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(HANSARD)

Monday, February 6, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 6, 2012

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC) moved that Bill C-377, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (requirements for labour organizations), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to my Bill C-377.

Labour organizations play a valuable role in Canadian society, representing and defending the rights of workers.

[*Translation*]

Four million, three hundred thousand Canadians are currently union members, and millions more have been during their working lives.

[*English*]

There are thousands of Canadians in my riding of South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, British Columbia, who pay dues to labour organizations. Because of the valuable role unions play in the lives of many Canadians, our federal tax system has provided benefits to support the work of unions. Key among those benefits are a 100% tax deductibility for the union dues that workers pay and tax exempt status for the labour organizations themselves.

I would like to put the value of the dues deductibility into perspective. The federal government forgoes \$795 million in tax revenue each year for union and professional dues. The majority of this amount is claimed by union members, probably in the range of \$400 million to \$500 million. This is a substantial public benefit. I believe it is only right for the public to know how that money is being spent. Therefore, my bill would require the public disclosure of the finances of labour organizations.

[*Translation*]

This measure is in line with the greater transparency that we are demanding from government departments, public agencies and native reserves. It is in line with the public disclosure required of other Canadian institutions that benefit from significant public funding.

[*English*]

For instance, public disclosure has been required for Canadian charities since 1977. The filings of charities are easy to find on the Canada Revenue Agency website.

I have based my requirements for public disclosure for labour organizations on the long existing provisions for charities in the Income Tax Act. With the passage of the bill, the public would be empowered to gauge the effectiveness, financial integrity and health of any labour union. This is something that Canadians want. According to a Nanos poll taken on Labour Day of last year, 83% of Canadians and 86% of union members want public financial disclosure for unions.

I would like to take a couple of minutes to run through the various provisions in the bill.

Clause 1 is the heart of the bill and can be considered in three parts.

First, there are three new definitions that would give greater clarity to terms already used or proposed in the bill. They are “labour organizations”, “labour relations activities” and “labour trust”.

Second, comes the lengthiest part of the bill: the statements of income and expenditures that must be submitted annually to the Minister of Revenue by labour organizations.

[*Translation*]

I have received plenty of input concerning the statements that would best illustrate how unions use their public benefits to help their members. The list is a long one, reflecting the often complex financial character of unions and the broad range of activities they undertake as they represent and serve their members.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Among these activities may be organizing, collective bargaining, education and training, conferences, political activities and lobbying. The required statements would also include disbursements to directors and to staff. As Jim Stanford, economist for the Canadian Auto Workers, recently pointed out, these figures are already published by the CAW. I believe that this level of detailed public disclosure would increase the confidence of Canadians that the public subsidy for labour organizations is warranted.

Third, subclause 1(4) would require that the information submitted be made available to the public by the minister, including posting on the Canada Revenue Agency website.

Clause 3 would have this act come into force six months following royal assent.

Since this bill was announced last fall, it has been interesting to receive feedback from various sources including union leaders themselves. First is a comment from Leron Lewis, president of the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill, representing over 3,000 employees. She said her union already publicly discloses. She said, "You can go online to look to see what was spent, when it was spent, and so on". And she says transparency is "something we believe in anyway".

Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, sees things a little differently. He agrees with public disclosure generally, saying, "We're not opposed to transparency. We're more than happy to supply [the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale] or anyone else with our financial statements and our balance sheets as corporations file". However, he goes on to say that, because my bill would ask for more detail than is currently requested from other institutions, "it's not fair and it's not equal".

Mr. Georgetti may be correct that it is time to review the public disclosure requirements for other types of institutions receiving public benefits to determine if they also need improving. The finance committee is looking at the question of increasing the level of transparency for charities. However, this private member's bill deals specifically with labour organizations which have never been subject to public disclosure, unlike charities, that have been subject to public disclosure for over 35 years.

Mr. Georgetti also raises a concern that compliance with this bill may be costly for unions. I disagree for three reasons. First, unions already file detailed financial returns with the CRA, providing much of the information that would be required by this bill. This is a point Mr. Georgetti has acknowledged. Second, this bill would not require audited statements. Therefore, filing would not impose any additional outside expense on labour organizations. Filing could generally be prepared by their own bookkeeping or financial personnel. Finally, because of bookkeeping software and electronic filing, the cost of compliance with these sorts of requirements has dropped considerably from where it might have been in generations past.

● (1110)

[Translation]

The government's document production cost will be minimal once the electronic production system, the database and the website are in place.

[English]

Members do not have to take it on faith, though. We have an independent and qualified watchdog in the form of the parliamentary budget officer, who examines private members' bills and gives feedback on their estimated costs. I believe that the PBO's analysis will confirm that this bill would not create significant costs to the government.

The comments from other Canadians are also interesting. A columnist for *The Windsor Star*, a strong union town, is supportive of the bill. He only regrets that it is not retroactive, as he would like to see how his union dues have been spent in the past. The communications director of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, David Climenhaga, said the following of unions:

Many publish their complete audited financial results, in spite of the fact this is not required by law, and distribute them to 100 per cent of their membership. Any member of the public, of course, may access that information. Such complete openness seems to do them no harm.

Mr. Climenhaga suggests that the same level of transparency be extended to think tanks and private corporations that benefit from tax breaks and subsidies.

Of course, usually the member introducing a private member's bill is granted the privilege of introducing and speaking to his or her bill before any other members. Unfortunately, as members will be aware, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh jumped the gun and started the debate before this allotted hour under the guise of a point of order. Despite the positive comments of various union leaders, union members and others who I have just referenced, the NDP House leader suggested last fall, in debating my earlier bill, that he was very disturbed by the idea of public accountability for labour organizations. He stated that this bill was a matter of ideology. I would ask him if the introduction of public disclosure for charities way back in 1977, 35 years ago, was a matter of ideology.

If there is an ideology, it is based on the principle that organizations that receive public benefits should be accountable to disclose how they use those benefits. Does the member believe that charities should no longer have to publicly disclose their spending? What about government departments, crown corporations or even members of Parliament? Where does the opposition to this bill logically lead? As I stated earlier, I believe that public disclosure would increase the confidence of Canadians that the several hundred million dollars in public benefits they provide to unions each year is money well spent. Does the NDP not agree that public disclosure would indeed prove this?

Private Members' Business

Further, the member complained about the additional costs he believed disclosure would cause unions to incur. As I mentioned, using tax software and electronic filing, the costs to labour organizations would be quite minimal. Filing is not a new activity for unions. Unions already file tax returns each year. Much of the information proposed to be collected under this bill is already required. The difference, of course, is that this information would be made public. However, that difference alone would create no cost for labour organizations.

The member has raised the concern that the filing requirement could be onerous for small locals of perhaps a few dozen members. That is again not so. Small locals are, by definition, small spenders and may not have spent anything in several of the categories mentioned in the bill. What can be easier than putting a zero on several pages of an electronic form? I believe that the experience of charities over the last 35 years is instructive. The process has not bogged down charities, which, unlike unions, are often run by volunteers alone. The process has not cost them significant sums of money, and the same would be true for labour organizations.

The debate on this bill is just getting under way. Some have already taken a position on it. I would encourage those who have already stated opposition to the bill to consider the following facts. The bill would not tell union leaders how to spend their money or restrict them in any way. The bill would not place a substantial burden or expense on unions. Unions are already engaged in responsible accounting. Many unions are already publicly reporting this financial information to members and others. Finally, all unions are already filing much of this information with the Canada Revenue Agency through their tax returns.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Simply put, this bill would require that information to be made public. As I said before, people want to know how unions use their public benefits.

[*English*]

I believe that asking for that type of transparency is legitimate. Both the public and MPs can learn more about this bill on a dedicated website I have set up. The address is www.c377.ca.

I would encourage all members of this House to consider the merits of this bill and support it going forward for further study at committee.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale is saying that this will not cost anything with all of the new technology available.

With this new technology available, I wonder why the Conservative Party is getting rid of the gun registry, which was said to be one of the big problems. It seems to me they did not have the technology to minimize the costs; they said it cost the taxpayers too much.

In this bill, the member is saying it will not cost anything. Even the Fraser Institute has said that hardworking women and men pay into their labour organizations to protect and advance their rights in the workplace and in society. The time and money allocated to those

reports, according to the Fraser Institute, will be money not spent by labour organizations to defend workers against bad profitable international businesses, such as Caterpillar and Rio Tinto.

What about all the money and tax relief the Conservative government has given to the oil companies and banks, which do not have to report to the public the money they get from the taxpayers?

I am wondering where this member is getting his facts and why he is only taking the side of big business and going against the labour movement—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I am baffled at the opposition of the NDP to this bill.

Not only do unions already have the means to collect this information, but they already submit it to the CRA. That is why there is no additional cost to the unions to do this.

More to the point, the member is suggesting that my party or I am somehow against union members or union organizations. That is simply not the case at all.

It is my belief that this bill will actually increase the confidence that Canadians have in labour organizations, because they will see the value produced by these institutions and that the money is well spent. As I said to the member earlier in my speech, 83% of Canadians want this information and 86% of union members polled want this information. The number is even higher in Quebec, where I have done much media and the latter are very supportive of this initiative.

• (1120)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments, but the first thing that comes to mind is that while the government on the one hand is focused on trying to target the union movement across Canada, the public on the other hand is concerned about the whole issue of transparency, something that the member talked a lot about, that is, public transparency.

Would the member not believe that the same principles of public transparency he is advocating for unions and so forth should actually apply to things such as the Prime Minister's Office? To what degree does the member believe the Prime Minister's Office should be more transparent about what is taking place inside that office?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, again, as I put it in my remarks, I do believe in public disclosure and I do in fact believe that perhaps other institutions that receive substantial public benefits should be evaluated in terms of the amount of disclosure required of them.

However, with a private member's bill, I am limited in what I can cover, and that is why I have chosen this particular topic. I am open to the question as to whether or not other organizations that receive public benefits, like charities, should also be required to make disclosures.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is something that has to be addressed. Is this bill designed to attack the NDP? Is it part of the government's campaign against union donations to the NDP convention?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, this came up early on when I introduced the bill. The reality is that this is a private member's bill and not a government bill. I started working on this bill more than a year ago. I started drafting it in June of last year. Therefore, any suggestion that this is anything other than my own initiative is simply false.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in spite of the protest of innocence by the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, let there be no doubt at all that this is a frontal attack on the labour movement in this country. It is also an indirect but very clear attack on a number of other rights that Canadian citizens and residents have in this country: the right of association; the right, quite frankly, to privacy; and the right to freedom of speech within the right of association. The bill undermines all of those rights, if not completely doing away with them in some cases.

To stand in this House, as the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale just has, to say this is all about accountability and transparency and not about ideology is totally false.

Let us understand the context of the bill. The Bush Republicans did the same thing in the United States. However, they did not go nearly as far as the bill before us does. I have two quotes on the ideology, strategy and tactics behind this. The first is by Newt Gingrich, one of the leading members of the ideological right in the United States, who said that requiring detailed disclosure on union advocacy activities would “weaken our opponents and encourage our allies”.

Another right-wing U.S. activist, Grover Norquist, said:

Every dollar that is spent [by labour unions] on disclosure and reporting is a dollar that can't be spent on other labour union activities.

This was designed from an ideological standpoint, and in the case of Canada, from a big business, multinational standpoint. The support behind the bill comes from that same group, and that is what is driving it. This is not about accountability and transparency. The level of hypocrisy of the government in this regard I think speaks clearly to that. This is an attack on the labour movement in this country.

The bill, to a certain degree, is modelled after the legislation at the federal level in the United States, but it goes much further. For instance, the law in the United States only covers the national unions and the national association of unions. In Canada, it would cover every single union organization, even some of the trusts they have set up around health and safety and the environment and a number of activities they carry on for which they have trust funds. It would cover every single one of those organizations, including the small union local, several of which I have in my riding and that have an executive of four or five people with no full-time staff.

The member is being disingenuous at the very best with the House when he suggests this is not much more than what unions already have to prepare by way of reporting. That is absolutely false.

I repeat, the bill in the United States does not go nearly as far as this one does. However, even in the United States the national unions found they had to assign two people to it for almost half the year to do the additional reporting the bill required.

I cannot be much clearer than this in estimating the consequences of this, just as some of the labour movement cannot be much clearer, because the bill before us would allow for more information to be required of unions by way of legislation. Of course, we have not seen those regulations and would not see them for some time. However, just in terms what is being required of unions to report, it would increase dramatically the amount of reporting they have to do.

There is another pattern that I see here. I happened to be in Russia when Putin was still the head of the government, where he had developed a strategy that required a lot of human rights groups, a lot of NGOs, to do an excessive amount of reporting. It was phenomenal. I will give the member from Surrey credit for not going quite as far as Putin did in that legislation. However, it was clearly designed to undermine the human rights groups in Russia because of the amount of material they had to report.

The bill, to some degree, is modelled after the same type of experience, which has had the effect in Russia of destroying a number of the groups. Some have gone underground because they could not do the reporting.

● (1125)

Therefore, we have two nice models here, that of the right-wing Republicans in the United States and that of Putin in Russia. In both cases, they are very clearly attacking those specific groups. In the U.S. it is the labour movement; in Russia it is the human rights movement and those NGOs.

The other point I want to make in terms of the context of this is that it is quite clear, including from the survey the member mentioned, that the information is available and the Canadian public and union members are not aware of it. In addition to that, according to the Fraser Institute, which analyzed the U.S. legislation, the information required was extensive and highly complex. Again, here I would point out that the bill before us would at least double the amount of information that unions in Canada will have to provide.

The Fraser Institute, in September 2006, when it looked at the legislation and its effect in the U.S., stated that due to the large amounts of information available:

It is very difficult and time-consuming for an average person to easily obtain a realistic idea of the financial performance of a union—

Thus, while the U.S. legislation does disclose a great deal, it does not do so in a way that facilitates analysis and comprehension by average, interested citizens.

Private Members' Business

When the labour movement did the analysis, what happened there, as was the intention right from the beginning, was that large corporations wanted to know about the organizing activities of the labour unions that might be trying to organize the work force or the collective bargaining process. They got the information and used it extensively. This was really private information that in the past had never been disclosed and they used it against the labour movement, quite effectively in a number of cases.

In this case, Bill C-377 goes much further in terms of organizing activities. It even requires the disclosure of expenses with regard to whom they hired as their lawyer. That part of the bill is going to get struck down by a court fairly early on; no court in this land is going to allow that part of it to stay. The bill simply does not accomplish the purpose the member talks about, because it is so complex in terms of the amount of detail that unions will have to give. That was the U.S. experience, and ours is going to be even worse if we go ahead.

However, the people who are really after this, the people supporting the bill, the large corporations and the right-wing in our country, would be able to do so because they have the resources to use this data effectively to thwart organizing drives and other campaigns that a union may take on. That is what it is designed to do. It has been a very effective mechanism in the United States to in fact accomplish that, and it is going to be even worse here. That is what this bill is all about.

It is important to appreciate as well that the Canadian people understand that information from the current reporting is available to all union members, either by way of provincial legislation or union constitution. Again, we have a problem with the bill because it probably extends itself into provincial territory, which will probably result in part of it to be struck down as well. Seven of the ten provinces require this information to be given to union membership. Every union constitution that I am aware of also requires consolidated financial statements to be given and made available to every single member of that union.

Let me finish with one final point and that is about the costs, which I believe the member is being disingenuous about with the House. There would be a huge increase in red tape from this file. If the government in fact follows through to enforce this, the number of people it will have to hire, we estimate, is somewhere in the range of at least a hundred people. A whole new data system would also have to be developed to analyze all of the data. We are talking of tens of millions, if not into the hundred million dollar range on an annual basis, of what it is going to cost.

If the government does not follow through, the information would simply be available and the big corporations would be able to use it against unions. That is what it is all about. One way or another, it would have the effect that the member wants, which is to give his "allies", as Newt Gingrich put it, this information to fight their enemies.

• (1130)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has raised this issue through a private member's bill put forward by the member for South Surrey—White Rock—

Cloverdale because it believes that this is an important issue that needs to be dealt with.

I have questioned the government's priorities in the past. When I look at this particular issue, I can honestly say that I have not received an email or a letter. In over a year, I have not had any discussion to indicate that this is the type of legislation that we need to bring in. I do not understand why the government, through the member, has made this an issue when there are many other issues facing the labour movement today, some of which the government itself has created. There is a credibility issue here.

The legislation calls for a wide spectrum of transparency and more accountability. Day after day, opposition members have been challenging the government to be more accountable and more transparent. It is very challenging to get the government to come clean and be transparent on a wide variety of issues, whether it is was some of the stuff that came out of the G8 and G20 meetings in Muskoka or a helicopter ride by the Minister of National Defence. There are an amazing number of issues on which we have been trying to get more transparency and more openness from the government.

It would be better for the member to talk to his caucus colleagues, particularly those in cabinet, about how important it is to have public transparency and ensure more accountability and so forth.

Labour is an important file. Over the years, I have had ample opportunities to meet with numerous members of the union movement and the average worker who I desire to represent to the nth degree. In the last year, I have met with some workers who are hugely disappointed in the government.

When the government brings in this type of legislation through a private member's bill stating that it wants more accountability, we only need to flashback to last year at what took place with Canada Post. Letter carriers and others who work for Canada Post feel that they were betrayed by the government, that the government was actually on the corporation's side. Members may recall that in January of last year the Government of Canada put a rollback in place that was already established between the corporation and the union.

Many within the union movement believe that the government has a hidden agenda when it comes to dealing with the union movement across Canada.

I am not sure if the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale is aware of the sensitivity of what he is proposing to do through this legislation. Labour legislation should be dealt with in a delicate way. We need to work with the union leadership and consult with the average worker. We also have an obligation to work with management.

We had a huge debate in the late eighties, early nineties, in the Manitoba legislature in regard to final offer selection legislation. The NDP brought it in a few years prior, put in on a pedestal and said that it was the future of labour union negotiations. As soon as Gary Filmon took office, he got rid of final offer selection. I remember sitting until 2 o'clock in the morning in committee meetings listening to many members of the public who shared the committee's concerns in regards to it. We heard from individuals who took extreme sides.

Private Members' Business

● (1135)

Commitments were made and broken and people were genuinely hurt because, at that time, I argue, we had two political parties that were prepared to play party politics over what was a very important issue. We brought forward an amendment that would have seen the survival of final offer section. However, at the end of the day, because it was a minority government back then, the Conservatives voted with the New Democrats to get rid of the amendment we had proposed that would have, in effect, saved final offer selection.

It is often a politically charged atmosphere when we bring in anything that has an impact on our unions, as well it should, because we want fair legislation, legislation that makes sense. We get a better sense of their actual needs when we talk to some of the workers and meet with the union leadership.

I made reference to Canada Post. I have talked with Canada Post employees. Another issue on which the government has dropped the ball on over the last year is Air Canada. The union is trying to protect jobs. I am a bit biased. I am from Manitoba and Manitoba has been hurt by Air Canada in terms of jobs. We believe that Air Canada was obligated by law to maintain certain jobs in Winnipeg and Air Canada has been breaking the law and yet the government allowed it to break the law at a substantial cost to jobs in the city of Winnipeg, not once, not twice, but three times that has occurred.

When we see things of that nature taking place, whether we are workers for Canada Post or workers in Air Canada, and we see government bringing forth labour legislation, we can understand and appreciate why there would be a high sense of insecure feelings and thoughts.

The average worker is concerned, first and foremost, about their ability to earn and sustain a reasonable income so they can provide for their family and their lifestyle. They are concerned about their pension, especially with the government's announcement that it will be increasing the retirement age from 65 to 67. I suspect that will be a hotly debated issue going forward. I plan on making it an issue.

I believe the unions do have a responsibility, not to endorse a political party, but to ensure that the workers, the people of Canada, are aware of some of these changes that will have a profound impact on things such as future labour negotiations. We believe that the vast majority of workers would want to see the retirement age stay at 65, as opposed to going to 67.

As a direct response to the government's policy, the unions will need to compensate. They will need to go to the negotiating tables and so forth. If they want to put out an advertisement or put up some sort of campaign, the government will want to know about it and it will want to know about the amount of money that will be spent. Where is the limit?

For just reasons, people should be concerned. I look to the member and to the government and make the suggestion that if by chance this legislation does go to committee stage, we hope the government will be open to allowing full representation from labour at committee stage.

● (1140)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand here before the House as a very proud 20-year union member of the Winnipeg Police Association, and I support the bill wholeheartedly because it is fair and it is transparent.

I congratulate the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale for his work on the bill. Since being elected in 2004, that member has been a very effective MP in the House and a great representative for his constituents. He also founded the all party parliamentary border caucus and he has been an important voice on border issues.

It is clear that today's bill has been very well researched, is highly informed and has already generated widespread support. I will share of that feedback later in my speech.

[*Translation*]

I would first like to briefly summarize the bill. Bill C-377 requires labour organizations to publicly disclose their finances. They would be required to produce standard financial information that would then be posted on the Canada Revenue Agency website.

This requirement would be similar to the one that already applies to charities. Members of labour organizations and the general public would therefore be able to assess the efficacy, financial integrity and health of all unions.

I encourage all Canadians to visit www.c377.ca, the website created by the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale in order to inform Canadians about this bill. Canadians can also download the petition, sign it and forward it to their neighbours to show their support for Bill C-377.

[*English*]

We all recognize that labour organizations play a key role in Canadian society by supporting workers' health and safety and ensuring that their members are appropriately compensated. However, we also acknowledge that the government provides substantial support to labour organizations through their tax-exempt status. Many have suggested that because the government provides financial support to these organizations, Canadians are entitled to accountability.

As we know, our Conservative government has been a strong supporter of great accountability. Our Conservative government introduced the Federal Accountability Act and other legislation designed to increase transparency in government agencies and crown corporations.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-377 would force labour organizations to make public certain information in order to allow their members and all Canadians to better assess the efficacy, financial integrity and health of labour organizations. In that regard, it is important to reiterate that charities that benefit from a similar tax exempt status have been required to publicly disclose this kind of information for decades.

Private Members' Business

As this bill goes through the legislative process, the Standing Committee on Finance will be able to give it a more thorough examination in order to ensure that it will achieve its objectives as effectively and efficiently as possible. To that end, the Standing Committee on Finance will hear from a number of groups with various perspectives. Many Canadians have already expressed their opinions regarding this bill.

[English]

It is important to share some of these insightful and well-informed opinions with the House and with all Canadians. Indeed, support for this bill extends well beyond partisan lines and has come from academics, labour, business, and everyday Canadians.

Even a former Liberal cabinet minister has voiced his support for Bill C-377. I want Canadians to listen to what a minister in Paul Martin's Liberal government had to say about this legislation. This is what Jean Lapierre, a former Liberal MP and cabinet minister from Quebec, had to say on the CTV news program *Power Play*:

Frankly, here in Quebec we have had that debate about the lack of transparency of a lot of unions. Frankly, I agree with that bill because I think now every organization has to be transparent. The unions, a lot of times, have acted like they were private clubs. And so I think everybody should go to more transparency and I think that the initiative is welcomed by the membership and also by the public at large because why would you hide your financial statements if you get all those tax credits and what have you. So no, I think it's long overdue.

This is what Louis Fortin, a certified human resources professional and associate researcher at the Montreal Economic Institute, said about this bill:

This bill will allow unionized employees to have a better understanding of the way in which the money from their union dues is managed and spent. Even though they already have the right to ask their representatives for [financial statements], union members could have easier and anonymous access to this information thanks to this new law.

Jasmin Guénette, vice-president at the Montreal Economic Institute, has also added that Bill C-377 is “good news for Quebecers, who are 94.6% in favour of the detailed disclosure of unions' financial information, according to a recent Nanos poll”.

Niels Veldhuis and Amela Karabegovic, two economists with the Fraser Institute, from whom we will likely hear at the finance committee, have written extensively regarding the issues raised in this bill. They wrote a detailed op-ed in the *National Post* about this issue in the fall and offered some very interesting points. Let me quote in detail a somewhat lengthy passage from the op-ed that explains why this bill is so important for Canadian workers in particular:

The provision of publically disclosed information about the financial status of unions enables workers to assess more accurately the financial position, activities and performance of their representatives. The public disclosure of financial information allows workers and interested parties to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of union spending. The increased transparency that comes from public disclosure is also essential for accountability and provides an incentive for union leaders to manage membership dues properly.

As I mentioned earlier, even unions have come out in favour of this bill. I am a union member, darn proud of it, and I support this bill 100%. Let me share with the House and Canadians what some of Canada's labour unions have been saying publicly about Bill C-377. For instance, this is what Leron Lewis, president of McGill University's largest on-campus union, the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill which represents over 3,000 members,

had to say: “You can go online to look to see what was spent, when it was spent, and so on...transparency is something we believe in anyway”.

Even media commentators are in favour of this legislation. This is what *Windsor Star* columnist Chris Vander Doelen had to say about it:

[Bill C-377] would require unions to file all their income and expenses, with the Canada Revenue Agency posting the results online just as they do for charities. Seems fair to me, since it's my money, and since unions are currently tax free, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars annually in forgone government income that could go to pay for, say, health care.

• (1150)

[Translation]

Of course, the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale is counting on many Canadians to support his efforts to increase transparency and accountability. I look forward to the results of the work done by the Standing Committee on Finance on this proposal.

[English]

Once again, I am a proud union member of the Winnipeg Police Association. I support this bill because it brings fairness and transparency to this issue. Any members on that side of the House who claim to be against transparency and against fairness ought to explain why the heck they are sitting in the House of Commons. That is what the business of this House is all about, fairness and transparency for all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-377 sponsored by the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale. To begin, I have to say a few words about the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance of the Conservative Party, who says she is a proud union member who wants there to be transparency. She must also be a proud Conservative. Why did she refuse last week to disclose the salaries of the employees of the Prime Minister's Office? The hon. member for Saint Boniface says she is transparent and likes her police association union. Police officers across Canada wanted to have a firearms registry, but that hon. member voted against it. What a joke. The hon. member, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, needs to get serious.

We can tell this is not a bill from the hon. member from British Columbia. This is not a bill from the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale. This is a government bill. The same thing happened with the firearms registry bill that was introduced by a private member. These are not private members' bills. This the Conservative government's way of sneaking through the back door instead of taking the front door.

Private Members' Business

Let us look at justice. If the hon. member who sponsored Bill C-377 truly believes in transparency, if the hon. member for Saint Boniface who just spoke truly believes in transparency, why did she fail to mention in her speech that organizations such as the Fraser Institute would not be subject to this bill? Why has no one mentioned that the oil companies, which are receiving taxpayers' money, are not subject to this bill? Speaking of transparency and justice, let us talk about the banks that received tax cuts even though they earned \$20 billion in profits last year and the CEOs of those banks were paid \$11 billion in bonuses. The Conservative government continues to give them tax cuts. If they want to talk about transparency, why do they not ask those people to be transparent?

I will quote the bill: "a statement of disbursements on labour relations activities." We are talking about a union that defends workers. Speaking of transparency, in seven provinces unions are required, under the labour code, to report to their members and not to the general public. All the minute details of union activities are not the concern of the general public, just as the day-to-day expenditures of banks or oil companies are not the concern of the general public.

Why are professional organizations and lawyers' associations in Canada not covered by the bill? It was because of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers that this House sat for 58 hours straight to force Canada Post workers to return to work. The member did not mention that unions are subject to fines under this bill. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance says that she is proud to be a union member. However, this bill will impose a \$1,000 fine for each day that unions fail to provide their financial statements.

There is no law in Canada that imposes such stiff fines on an organization. The member for Saint Boniface has the audacity to tell the House that she is a proud union member, that she is close to police unions, that she respects them. However, she wants to impose a fine of \$1,000 per day on the union and take away money needed by workers to conduct negotiations with companies.

• (1155)

She wants unions to disclose all of their financial statements. The companies that unions bargain with, such as Royal Bank, Bank of Montreal, Toronto Dominion and all of the other banks and oil companies, will take advantage of that information.

The government wants them to disclose their financial statements. For crying out loud.

The member could have taken the time to include other organizations in his bill. I have been in the House of Commons for 15 years, so I know how bills can be written. The member could have included labour organizations and big business. He could have included everyone, but that is not what the Conservatives chose to do. They chose to attack the people who represent workers.

If the member did not intend to attack workers, he would have said that he believes in transparency and that, since there are seven provinces in which unions already send their financial statements to members as per the Canada Labour Code, that would be rolled out across Canada. But that is not what he did. He wants unions to disclose their financial statements to everyone. What does that

mean? That means unions will have to provide the information to their adversaries, to employers, to oil companies and to big companies such as Caterpillar.

How much taxpayer money did Caterpillar get from the Government of Canada? Does the member have any idea? Now Caterpillar is closing its doors, relocating its operations and firing its workers. What does the member have to say about that? What are the Conservatives going to do about that? The Prime Minister himself went to London, Ontario, and shook hands with Caterpillar management. I see him get off that engine every time I watch TV. What about the taxpayers' money? How transparent was Caterpillar after it got taxpayers' money? Now it has closed its doors and left its workers out in the cold. The same thing happened with White Birch Paper in Quebec. It has closed its doors because it does not want to give workers their pension fund.

Who is now crucifying the workers, the men and women of our country? It is large corporations that close their doors when things do not go their way and put the workers out on the street. Why has the government not addressed this major problem? The government should tell the large corporations that they are accountable because the government gave them tax cuts. If the government wants to be so transparent, why do the employees of the Prime Minister's Office not tell us how much they make? Why are we not allowed to know how much they are being paid? I do not believe that the Conservatives are being transparent. Give me a break. Give me a break. This is simply another attack on the labour movement, like the ones the government launched against postal workers and against Air Canada employees.

I am certain that workers and all Canadians will understand the game that the Conservatives are playing.

People worked hard to earn pensions, salaries, good working conditions and the right to workplace health and safety. That is not what the Conservative government wants. It wants to take away what little workers have obtained in Canada. That is what this member is doing with his bill. This is not transparency. If he wanted to talk about transparency, he would have told these organizations to be accountable to their members, but he knows that they are already.

What is this government looking for? It only wants to destroy these organizations. I am not ashamed to stand up and defend workers and the organizations that work to protect them from abuse and slavery in the workplace. New Brunswickers move out west and, three days later, the employer tells them to get back on the plane and go home. The employer leaves them hanging. Is this social justice? Is this justice for workers? No. It is shameful to have a bill such as this one. I will fight against it. I have reason to believe that the Conservative government is going to pass this bill, in the same way it destroyed the firearms registry, which was there to protect Canadians.

One day, Canadians will have the chance to vote, and I hope that they will throw the Conservatives out once and for all.

• (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There are 10 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-19. Motions Nos. 1 to 10 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

I will now propose Motions Nos. 1 to 10 to the House.

• (1205)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 1

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved:

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 11.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 19.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved:

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 23.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 24.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 28.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-19 be amended by deleting Clause 29.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the report stage of the bill. The first amendment standing in my name would delete clause 1. One might wonder why I would want to delete clause 1 of a particular bill because it is the short title. We had a debate about this at committee stage. Clause 1 of the bill states, "This Act may be cited as the Ending the Long-gun Registry Act". The intent of the government seems to be that it wants to end the long gun registry. Instead, it has proposed a bill that would do a heck of a lot more than end the long gun registry.

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First, there is no such thing as a long gun registry. We have a registry of guns, which consists of various types of guns and rifles. There are prohibited weapons, restricted weapons and then there is everything else. Included in the everything else category are the ones that the Conservatives have been talking about for years and have done nothing to fix the problems and anomalies that occurred as a result of the failed implementation by the Liberal Party when it was in power. They just talked about the long gun registry as if it were a separate registry that was designed to make criminals out of law-abiding hunters and farmers, which seems to be the common phrase. That seemed to be the mantra. However, what we have is legislation that is reckless in its design.

I moved an amendment, which I could not move here because it was already moved in committee, to rename the bill the "risking public safety act". That is what Bill C-19 would do. It would risk public safety by treating all non-registered, non-restricted and non-prohibited weapons the same. In that category is included semi-automatic rifles, assault rifles, sniper rifles, a whole variety of guns that are in very dangerous to public safety. Therefore, they would not be controlled at all.

Second, the bill would prohibit a recording of transfers in certain instances. If I have a shotgun and I sell it, the current legislation requires me to contact the registry to find out if the buyer has a licence that is valid. If the buyer shows me a licence, that would not be good enough. I would have to call and ask whether the buyer's licence is a valid and existing licence. In the interim, from when the licence was issued, the buyer may have been subject to a firearms prohibition for any number of reasons unknown to me, even if I am related to the buyer. The buyer could be my brother-in-law or my first cousin, but I may not know that he or she has a firearms prohibition for any number of reasons, whether it be trouble with the law because of having committed an offence or exhibiting signs of mental instability that I have been unable to detect because I know the buyer so well and he or she seems normal enough to me. Nevertheless, the buyer could be prohibited from having firearms and that licence might not be valid. The registry would inform me of that and I would not sell my rifle to that person.

The provision says that if I am going to sell my rifle, I may call the registry. However, and this is important, the legislation says that nobody at the other end is allowed to record that call, that the registry is not allowed to keep a record of me checking that out.

What is the purpose of that? It serves no purpose whatsoever. In fact, it makes the other provisions requiring an action by the a seller to check a licence unenforceable. That is what the Mounties say about it. The RCMP, which run the registry and which the government does not listen to in this regard, has said that this is tantamount to making the rules unenforceable. One of the consequences of that is it will lead to an underground market in rifles and shotguns and other non-restricted weapons.

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•(1210)

By doing this, the government will be removing any requirement for gun shops, sporting goods stores, Canadian Tire stores, to keep a record of to whom they have sold rifles, shotguns or even ammunition. They used to have to do that. That provision lapsed when the gun registry was brought in because it was unnecessary because all guns had to be registered, so that was okay.

By removing the requirement for all non-restricted or non-prohibited guns to be registered, there will be no record. The government has not reinstated the requirement for gun shops, sporting goods stores, Canadian Tire stores, which are entitled to sell guns in Canada, to do that anymore. We basically have a loosey-goosey system for the registration of guns or police knowledge of guns.

When we wonder why Canadian police chiefs are opposed to these changes, we just have to look at the comments they have made. They talk about the registry being an important investigative tool, that it helps them investigate crimes, that it helps them find the source of guns and trace guns. We have an international obligation to do that.

Something that has been misconstrued by government members and witnesses at committee and members throughout the House is the fact that 14,000 times a day the registry is consulted by police forces and individual public enforcement agencies across the country. If we put all these things together, we understand how important the gun registry is to police services.

A lot of talk was had both in committee and in the House, suggesting that this was really only incidental, that law enforcement was not consulting the registry, but rather consulting CPIC, which has registry information on it. That was the spin given on this. Any time a police officer checked a licence, automatically this picked over a check on the registry and that was part of the use of the registry. It turns out that is not true.

I have a copy of the last RCMP report dated November 2011, signed by previous RCMP commissioner, William Elliott. The report was not released until January. It was not made available to our committee and the House did not ask for it, but it was made available to the Minister of Public Safety. It was one of the last acts of William Elliott as commissioner of firearms. The report said that the 14,000 inquires in 2010 were made to the firearms registry, looking for information on firearms or on individuals.

That shows two things. First, it shows how useful this instrument is for police forces across the country. Second, it shows a bit of a pattern of a lack of full disclosure by the government and government members on this issue. The Conservatives do not want people to know the facts because they do not want the facts to get in the way of the argument that they have made time and time again.

This is of importance to a lot of Canadians, on both sides of the issue. In the government's zeal to kill the registry, it has done unintended things. There is the law of unintended consequences. Many of the unintended consequences have to do with the fact that the Conservatives are risking public safety by making things worse than they were before the registry came into effect. That is wrong. To

call it the ending of the long gun registry act is inaccurate and inadequate. We think that should be deleted.

•(1215)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can my colleague explain and comment on the remarks made by the so-called Minister of Public Safety, who refuses to listen to the Province of Quebec and who has responded once again with a flat "no" to the request to transfer rather than destroy the registry data?

What can he say about this?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, another important aspect of this is the risking of public safety. By going further and failing to allow other governments to make use of information, which was collected at public expense, in the interest of public safety, the government is clearly risking public safety, in this case of Quebecers, and we think that is wrong.

The government has not listened to anybody on this issue. It is making a big to-do about listening to victims and that it is the only government that has ever listened to victims. We had the victims of the polytechnique massacre before our committee and they were not listened to. We had victims of domestic violence and they were not listened to. We have had spokespersons on behalf of victims whose family members were murdered and they were not listened to. The Government of Quebec was not listened to.

There is a tremendous amount of hypocrisy going on here. I hope Canadians take note of that and are aware that this hullabaloo about listening to victims only happens when it suits the government to use it for its own purpose.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my hon. colleague could address this question. He continues to generate this question about the automated queries that are conducted by police across this country.

We heard clear testimony at committee that the vast majority of those queries were automated. It is misleading to suggest to Canadians that the checks directly to the firearms registry are checks done by direct front-line police officers. He is not telling Canadians that that is, by and large, done by an automated system or by telecom operators who work in a back room somewhere. They are not being conducted by front-line police on the streets when they are going out in response to calls. The member is continuing to perpetuate that.

With a 43% to 90% error rate in that information, can my colleague honestly say that is the kind of information we want to hand over to the Province of Quebec or have our law enforcement officers rely on for their own safety?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question because it is one that has been used by the government side.

The report of the Commissioner of Firearms dated November clarifies that point and indicates that the queries may be both automated and manual but that these are queries to the firearms registry itself and not just checking on a licence.

There may well be certain errors in any database but work has been done on that, too. The error rate is very small as it stands right now. In handing that over to someone to build a database from, obviously eliminating the errors, would be part of the building of that database.

I do not think it is irresponsible at all. In fact, I think it is reckless and irresponsible to destroy that information when we have a government that wants to make use of it to protect its citizens and to uphold its citizens' desire to have a comprehensive gun control program in its province.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member for St. John's East expand on a point? With the passage of this legislation, should it pass, which we expect it will, what will be the situation for Canadians in relation to the protections that existed before this act was brought in?

The member mentioned certain aspects would become moot. Which weapons would no longer be registered?

• (1220)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is many guns. The gun that was used in the polytechnique massacre for example would no longer be required to be registered. The gun used in the Dawson College shooting in Montreal would not be required to be registered. Sniper rifles would not be required to be registered.

There is a whole series of them. Sawed-off shotguns that are manufactured as sawed-off shotguns, in other words not cut off, would not be required to be registered. There is a whole host of problems that are created by this bill, some of which the government knew about and others which it did not.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the important issue of the gun registry. We have been fighting this battle for quite some time and have devoted more effort to it since the arrival of this government in 2006.

In my speech, I will address three fundamental aspects of the motions that we have introduced. The first aspect is that we obviously want to try to prevent this government from abolishing the gun registry. All experts told us that the registry is relevant, including women's groups, the police and victims' groups. Without exception, they told us that the registry is an important public safety tool, a tool that saves lives, that helps police with their investigations, and that helps keep police safe as they go about their daily work. The gun registry costs around \$4.1 million per year, which amounts to 12¢ per capita.

We do not understand why the government is saying that it is extremely expensive. I will talk about another paradox. This government is prepared to spend \$7.5 million on a queen's jubilee, including \$3.7 million on medals. That amount could pay for the gun registry for a year or more. The government prefers to spend money on a queen's jubilee rather than on the public safety of the women and children of Quebec and Canada.

The president of the *Fraternité des policiers et policières de Montréal* was very clear about this on May 13, 2010. This shows that this is a long-standing debate. He said:

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...rarely has there been such unanimity among Canadian police—namely the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Association of Police Boards—who concur with women's and suicide prevention groups that the registry must not be touched.

...If Bill C-391 is passed, the Ruger Mini-14—used by the killer at École Polytechnique on December 6, 1989—will no longer have to be registered. That makes no sense.

Many experts agree that abolishing this registry makes no sense, but the government will not listen. Since 2006, these experts, including police officers, as well as women and victims, have told the government time and time again that it is wrong and that its actions will have serious repercussions on public safety.

The Barreau du Québec even said that the Firearms Act must be maintained as it currently exists and that scrapping the firearms registry will put public safety at risk.

This is not a good start for a government that claims to be tough on crime. I think my colleagues would agree that the people who came and gave evidence knew what they were talking about. They were experts. They were people who work in the field in this domain and who told us that this does not make sense.

The question remains: where is the problem? Registering a firearm, even transferring a firearm, is free. Furthermore, it can be done in just a few minutes, either by phone or online.

The firearms registry is an effective crime prevention tool, and I will give some examples. Of course, this government believes that all the statistics we quote are fictitious, but we will quote them nonetheless. In Quebec, the rate of homicides committed with a firearm dropped by 40% between 1995, when the registry first came into effect, and 2006. Of course, this registry has also had an impact on the rate of suicides committed with firearms. Several studies have been done on the matter.

• (1225)

Access to a firearm combined with a temporary or long-term depression can result in a person using a firearm to take their own life.

Both homicides and suicides are prevented thanks to this registry. Prevention occurs thanks to the registry and the numbers are there to prove it.

This registry has also contributed to reducing the theft of hunting rifles from hunters. How so? A registered weapon is undesirable to criminals because it is easier to trace the weapon used in a homicide or any other crime if it is registered. It is therefore beneficial for hunters to register their firearms because it prevents their firearms from being stolen.

This registry also makes police work easier. According to the numbers released by the RCMP in August 2010, the registry is consulted 11,000 times a day across Canada and, of that number, 2,842 consultations are linked to public safety related events. As we can see, the registry is not consulted for nothing.

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The very troubling thing about this bill is that it includes no provision to restore the requirement for businesses to keep sales records for firearms. That requirement existed from 1977 until the bill to create the firearms registry was passed in 1995. That requirement was dropped because now we had a registry. Not only does this provision no longer exist, but it is not included as a guideline in the current bill. It is not there. When we look at it, we get the impression we are going back 35 years, but with this government we are starting to get used to living in prehistoric times.

This second aspect is underscored in the motions we have moved: I am talking about verifying the validity of the permit when a firearm is sold. Under this bill, such verification becomes optional, which means that, in the case of a person whose permit has been revoked or who falsifies the documents, the firearms vendor would not verify the validity of the permit. We know that 7,000 long gun registrations were revoked by judges in 2009 for public safety reasons, including mental health and many other reasons. In other words, someone whose permit has been revoked can easily buy a firearm since no one is checking the validity of the permit.

The third factor mentioned in our motions is, of course, the destruction of data. This government was clear. During the last election and in previous elections, the government has always been clear. We cannot criticize the Conservatives in that regard. They always said that they would abolish the firearms registry. However, they have never been given a mandate to destroy the data. In any case, it was never clearly specified during the last election. As an aside, 80% of the population of Quebec did not vote for this government. We see that this government is completely out of step with Quebec values.

That being said, it is unacceptable for the government to destroy the data because, for one thing, it does not even have the mandate to do so. For another, there are provinces that want the data to create their own registries, perhaps later on, which is only fair. I think these provinces have the right to have their own registries. Quebec made the request and Quebec taxpayers have already paid for this registry. We have already paid. Taxpayers across Canada paid for this registry. Quebecers paid for it and they have the right to have the data from this registry.

The president of the Fédération des policiers et policières municipaux du Québec, Mr. Côté, said that, next to the physical evidence of the weapon, the starting point for an investigation is often the data, which make it possible to identify important witnesses or even a suspect.

In short, the people who will benefit from this bill are criminal gang members, simply because they will now be able to easily steal firearms that will no longer be registered. They will be able to acquire weapons since, in theory, everyone can now have them and commit crimes.

•(1230)

Now, I am calling upon the Government of Quebec to keep the promise it made to all the victims of the Polytechnique and Dawson College massacres and women's groups by creating a Quebec firearms registry no matter what happens, whether or not the Conservatives transfer the data.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week, Ms. O'Sullivan, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, stated that, in her professional opinion, Canada is not doing enough for victims.

Does my colleague agree with the federal ombudsman that eliminating the gun registry, which helps protect victims, makes no sense and will exacerbate the problem? The Conservatives are obsessed with harsher penalties and the freedom to bear arms, but they could not care less about victims.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. Unfortunately, he is absolutely right. This is nothing new. They have been singing the same old song since 2006. The government says that it speaks on behalf of victims and protects them. Mr. Sullivan, the former federal ombudsman, also said that this government was not doing anything for victims.

Before the election, the Bloc Québécois introduced a bill in the House to protect victims' families, and it will reintroduce that bill. The NDP and the Liberals all supported the bill, but the Conservative government never supported the bill, which would have helped victims, including men and women who have lost children or whose children have committed suicide.

This government could have done the right thing for victims, but it did not. This government does not protect victims; it just uses the law to get revenge. The problem is that public safety should not be based on vengeance and backward ideology. It should be based on rehabilitation, prevention, an intelligent response to crime and, most importantly, victim support.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is very concerning is that every time the Conservatives come forward with one of these gun bills, they use the bill to try to get through a whole manner of other things. The last bill they had would have allowed gang-bangers in Vancouver to drive around with restricted weapons without being stopped.

Now we see from the change in the licensing requirements that there would be a whole illicit trade in guns, because one would not actually have to verify that someone has a proper licence. If one phones the registry to find out if someone has even done this, it will be clear that even the registry is not allowed to keep a record.

It seems to me what we are seeing is nudge, nudge, wink, wink to the gun lobby that once the law comes into effect, it will be open season and people will be able to trade guns however they want, and no one will have the legal protection to find out.

Why are the Conservatives making it impossible to keep record checks so we could find out whether people should be able to buy these guns?

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•(1235)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I have been watching this government since 2006, particularly concerning this issue. I simply cannot understand its position, because all experts agree on the relevance, value and importance of this registry. Furthermore, one of the experts called upon by this government even wrote a book entitled “How to Manipulate Public Opinion”. This just goes to show the kind of experts the government relies on.

That said, the Conservatives have still not implemented the regulation that would allow imported weapons to be registered and documented. The United States has similar regulations. In the U.S., when a foreign weapon enters the country, they know where it comes from, which company made it, what year it was made and so on. Canada has yet to implement that regulation, although it exists. Yes, this does facilitate weapons trafficking.

This government claims that it wants to fight weapons trafficking and violence in our streets, but at the end of the day, what is it doing? It is allowing weapons to circulate freely. Tomorrow morning, anyone can go and purchase a weapon, without registering it of course. Thus, the authorities will never know this person has a weapon, let alone how many. Imagine that. People can easily import weapons because, in any case, although the regulation on importing weapons exists, it has not been enforced. This government has been influenced by the firearms lobby—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have amendments before the House today that would delete certain sections of the act, such as the section to eliminate and destroy the registry records at the time the bill passes. Other sections I seek to delete would make it an offence to travel with long guns in a vehicle. I think this would help to create more public safety at the time the bill is going through.

Speaking more generally to the bill, I remember where the bill came from. We all recall the killings at École Polytechnique and the great demand by Canadians from coast to coast that we act to take greater steps to control the use of weapons in crimes of violence.

One of the witnesses before the committee back in November of last year, Nathalie Provost, was one of those who had been shot at École Polytechnique. I wish to quote from some of her evidence:

[*Translation*]

I was injured on December 6, 1989, at the École Polytechnique by a shot with a semi-automatic rifle while other more seriously wounded students died around me. Long guns are dangerous, as I know only too well.

[*English*]

If we pass this bill, we will abandon a lot of work done by many Canadians who were friends and families of the victims, but more so, those across the country who recognized the risk and realized we should take action.

That is not to say that the long gun registry has been perfect. It is not to say that it was implemented in ways that made all Canadians

confident in the system. I believe there would have been, had there been an occasion for compromise, an opportunity for those who had legitimate concerns to see changes made to this bill.

Here, I recognize that for members of the Conservative party, and for two members of the New Democratic Party who chose as a matter of conscience to vote with the Conservatives on this bill, there are aspects of the way the long gun registry has been created that create concern. For members of the Green Party, I have heard from a lot of people in rural areas who would like to see the legislation changed. However, the circumstances were such that we were forced to be for or against the bill, with no compromise. There was no room for us to see how we could maintain a registry so that we would know where semi-automatic weapons were, and know which guns were used by snipers, and know if they were sawed-off shotguns, so that we would know where these arms were and that if they were legal weapons in Canada that had to be registered, we could maintain that registry.

I am afraid that in the haste to kill the long gun registry, because it has been such a rallying cry for the Conservative party, it has moved too fast. This is not the first time they have done that. It has moved so fast that it has ignored the implications confirmed to us by the RCMP, that in removing the long gun registry we are now moving backwards to a point farther back than where we were before this bill was passed. We are going back more than 30 years and losing the requirement that a person who buys a weapon must ensure at the point of sale that the purchase is registered, so that the police will know that someone has a weapon. We have absolutely wiped out the registration for a whole category of weapons, including the kind of gun that was used at the massacre at École Polytechnique and the kind of weapon that was used at the CEGEP at Macdonald College.

Moving too rapidly like this, and not thinking things through because the goals have become much more geared by spin doctors than by criminal law analysts, is leading to our having bad legislation passed. I think we should now ask at report stage that we rethink this. The opportunity is a brief one: it comes down to 10 amendments put forward by members of the official opposition, the Green party, and the Bloc, as seconded by members of all parties on the opposition benches. They are saying that we should just take this chance to think this through whether we can, by deleting the sections that create unacceptable situations, and provide a way to lessen the negative impact of this legislation.

I wish we could have started this over, bearing in mind the concerns of so many witnesses before the House of Commons committee. I am reminded very much of the importance of the evidence by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. It pointed out very clearly in its evidence that there was a significant preventative and investigational value to law enforcement and the communities it serves in having the long gun registry. It pointed out that, yes, there has been over-spending. We certainly know that much more was invested in setting up the long gun registry than needed to be done. It certainly went over budget, but that money is all sunk costs. The annual functioning of the long gun registry now, as confirmed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police investigation, and confirmed by the Canadian Association of Canadian Chiefs of Police, is cost effective.

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We have a registry now that is working and that law enforcement officials have reasons to use. If we look to the most recent report of the RCMP, the 2010 report that came out after the House adjourned for Christmas and the New Year, it again confirms that this registry is being used by law enforcement officials. It is being used more than ever before. It is being found to be cost effective.

• (1240)

If ever there was a time for members of the Conservative Party who are concerned about crime on our streets to pause and consider, this would be it. As my colleague from the Bloc Québécois just pointed out, when the registry is functioning and a long gun has been registered, it reduces the likelihood that someone will steal it. It is traceable and trackable. It actually reduces the risk of crime to legitimate legal gun owners.

We also know it provides police with the tools to avoid a conflict when responding to a domestic violence situation if they know there is a long gun present in the home. Gatineau police chief Mario Harel testified that the current registry is “a reasonable balance between the exercise of an individual privilege and the broader right of society to be safe”.

Since the House adjourned at Christmastime, there has been greater and greater evidence that this bill has moved too quickly and we are losing the opportunity to keep Canadians safe. The venerable mayor of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion, in mid-December called for a reconsideration of scrapping the long gun registry as it became quite clear that more weapons would not be traceable at all through the failure to recreate the existing registrations that were set aside when the superior registrations under the long gun registry came into effect.

The rush to kill the registry is borne more out of a visceral hatred for the fact it was created at all than for sensible public policy. There is a middle ground. In their speed and ideological vengeance toward the previous Liberal government which brought in the long gun registry, I am afraid my colleagues and friends in the Conservative Party are moving too quickly.

It is time to do as much as we can at report stage and pass all the amendments. I would plead with Conservative Party members to pass Motions Nos. 1 through 10. This would go a considerable way toward improving this legislation. I beg colleagues on all sides of the House with constituents in rural areas, hunters, farmers and those driven by a concern for the safety of women and knowing that passing this legislation would put women's lives at risk, to take the chance and pass these amendments.

• (1245)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I respect my colleague's opinions on this, but there is so much misinformation and facts that just are not true, that I must ask a question.

The member has been in my riding a number of times. She will know that a number of surveys have been done in my riding over the last seven or eight years, and the lowest number ever was 82% on any poll ever done. That is not my own number. The numbers from the radio stations and newspapers support that. She should know that

in rural Canada, especially my riding, the registry is just a plain bad idea.

She talked about more debate on the issue. I have been at this and I know the member for Yorkton—Melville has been at this for 16 years. How much time for debate does she really think we need? Would 17 years do it?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I love going to the riding of the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. The fact that his riding had the wisdom to elect the first woman member of Parliament to the House of Commons, Agnes MacPhail, gives us good reason to rethink this legislation in the interests of women's rights across Canada.

I do not doubt for one moment that the majority of constituents opposed it as it was constituted. I hope in my statement I made it clear that I think it needed fixing. It had an unnecessary number of measures that made law-abiding rural residents feel they were becoming criminalized. We could have come to a middle ground where we could all agree to keep the registry and law enforcement tools while removing the elements that unfairly stigmatized law-abiding gun owners.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech. She spoke about the consequences of abolishing the gun registry, including the theft of legal guns used for hunting. Long before the registry was created, most criminal groups—those who did not have a gun trafficking network but had hand guns—could obtain shotguns simply by stealing them from homes. They would saw off the shotgun to make it even more dangerous than a hand gun and easy to conceal. It is easier to conceal this type of gun.

If we abolish the gun registry, do we not run the risk of an increase in this type of theft and the use of these types of modified guns because they will no longer be registered and therefore will be easy to use?

• (1250)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. With this bill there is a very real risk that the theft of long guns will increase. These thefts could rise because no law exists requiring the registration of long guns. There is the risk of more, not less, crime. I am absolutely sure that the Conservative members would be unhappy with this outcome, but that is what will happen.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak again to Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry act.

In my last speech on this bill, I talked about what role long guns play in Canadians' lives in both rural and urban settings, for women and for men. They are tools for hunting, tools for trapping, tools for farming, and tools for athletics. I talked about how they constitute a symbol of our past and indeed remain a necessary tool in present day life for so many Canadians. First nation, aboriginal and all law-abiding gun owners have been stigmatized and subjected to this onerous and misguided legislation for far too long.

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Since the second reading of Bill C-19, the opposition has not lacked in emotion but has consistently fallen short on the facts. Here are the facts. The long gun registry does nothing to make Canadians safer. We were told the long gun registry would cost about \$2 million, and the cost has ballooned to exceed \$2 billion. The long gun registry targets law-abiding citizens because criminals are not registering guns, nor are they using these sorts of guns to commit crimes.

I would like to introduce members to what I call the seven myths of the opposition. If any of my hon. colleagues would like to count along with me, they would be more than welcome to do so.

Myth number one is that the long gun registry will help keep suicide rates down.

During committee, of which I was a member, we heard clear evidence from peer-reviewed studies which concluded that the discontinuation of the registration of non-restricted firearms is not likely to result in an increase in the aggregate suicide rate.

Myth number two is that the long gun registry will keep women safer.

During committee we heard peer-reviewed research which demonstrated that the discontinuation of the registration of non-restricted firearms will not result in an increase in homicide or spousal homicide rates through the utilization of long guns.

This only makes sense because the people registering long guns are not committing these crimes. These are men and women who are impeded by the red tape and the stigma of being long gun owners. They do their civic duty, despite the unnecessary and wasteful burden imposed, and register their firearms because their government tells them it is the law. Meanwhile, criminals do not do any of this and enjoy the freedom to operate outside of the law with all the rights and protections of the law. This does not make sense to people in my riding, and it does not make sense to me.

The opposition attempts to position the debate on long guns as men against women, and offender and victim. At committee we heard directly from women, women who hunt, women who trap, women who have represented our great nation in international shooting competitions. The opposition would like Canadians to believe it is only men who own guns, and this is simply not the case.

Myth number three is that guns will now be as easy to get as checking out a book at a library.

The opposition is ignoring the facts and misleading people who do not own long guns and who are not familiar with the process. I can tell Canadians, as can any long gun owner, that the requirements for licensing are not changing and include a Canadian firearms safety course, and for some, additional hunter safety and ethics development courses, and of course pre-screening security background checks.

Myth number four is that police support the registry and the elimination of the registry will put police in danger.

Here is what we heard from law enforcement officers:

I can tell you that the registration of long guns did not make my job as a conservation officer safer.

That was said by Donald Weltz at committee.

We also heard in committee that a survey conducted in April 2011 of 2,631 Edmonton city police concluded that 81% supported scrapping the long gun registry. We heard that the Auditor General found that the RCMP could not rely on the registry on account of the large number of errors and omissions. We heard numerous times that the police state they do not trust the information contained in the registry and they would not rely on that information to ensure their safety.

Myth number five is that the data should be saved and turned over to the provinces that wish to create their own registry.

The registry is the data. Our commitment to the Canadian people was clear that anything less would be disingenuous. The data was collected under federal law for a federal purpose and it will not be turned over to another jurisdiction.

●(1255)

The committee heard evidence that the RCMP had reported error rates between 43% and 90% in firearms applications and registry information. We also heard that a manual search conducted discovered that 4,438 stolen firearms had been successfully re-registered. With these errors, it would be irresponsible to the extreme to allow this unreliable, ineffective and grossly expensive system to be handed over to anyone.

Myth No. 6: Registering a long gun is no different from registering a car. What did we hear in committee on this assumption? Solomon Friedman accurately stated that unlike registering our car, failure to comply or errors in the application have criminal implications. People do not go to jail or receive a criminal record if they do not register their car.

Myth No. 7: Registering a firearm is simple, so what is the harm? Again, the harm is that any mistake has criminal implications, and the mistakes in the registry are staggering.

Furthermore, consider more testimony from Mr. Friedman:

I have two law degrees. I clerked at the Supreme Court of Canada, and I practise criminal law for a living. Even I at times find the provisions of the Firearms Act and the gun control portions of the Criminal Code convoluted, complex, and confusing.

If that is the case, how can we expect average Canadians to navigate this quagmire without error and how can we have criminal consequences as a result? How can we expect our law enforcement officers to interpret and apply complex and convoluted legislation with discretion and consistency if a criminal lawyer well-versed and studied on the subject matter finds it difficult at times?

I will highlight the conclusions of Gary Mauser, PhD, Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Canadian Urban Research Studies, Simon Fraser University, when he accurately pointed out that “responsible gun owners are less likely to” commit murder “than other Canadians”. He went on to say that the long gun had not demonstrated its value to the police and that “the data in the long-gun registry are of such poor quality that they should be destroyed”.

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That is exactly what would happen.

Our government has made a clear commitment. Promise made, promise kept. We know we are on the right track. How do we know this? Two years ago, my hon. colleague, the member for Portage—Lisgar, introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-391. If that bill had passed, it would have ended the long gun registry but it was defeated in this House by a mere two votes. However, those were not free votes. Members turned their backs on their constituents for fear of reprisal from their party. Some stated publicly that they were in favour of scrapping the registry but were not willing to leave their party over it or be removed from it. The only reason the long gun registry has survived this long is that members picked their parties over their constituents. Canadians remembered that last May.

How else do we know we are on the course? Evidence in the committee, as I have already mentioned, was overwhelmingly in favour of getting rid of the long gun registry, and that was empirical evidence, not opinion evidence. Members from the opposition, the members for Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Thunder Bay—Superior North, voted in favour of Bill C-19 but were punished for it. They were punished for doing what their constituents wanted. I congratulate them for that decision. The member for Western Arctic abstained from the second reading vote. One can only hope that the member will remember his commitments to the great people of the Northwest Territories and that he chooses them and choose facts over the hysteria and hyperbole running rampant through the opposition benches.

Regardless, I can tell the citizens of Yukon, NWT and Nunavut that this member and the hon. member for Nunavut will be standing up for their rights and their use of long guns as daily tools to practise traditional, cultural and present day necessities of life by standing up and voting to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

• (1300)

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this issue is certainly important to the constituents of my riding of Scarborough Southwest, an urban Toronto riding. I know that getting rid of the data in the gun registry will not make Canadians safer.

I listened to the member's impassioned speech. Certainly, open and free debate is what we need in this country on these issues. The member raised some serious issues. If we were to take at face value that there are a large number of errors in the registry, as well as an alarming rate of stolen fire arms re-registered, that begs the question of how and why did that happened. Who was responsible for the gun registry? Yes, it was introduced by another government but, since 2006, the current government has been in power. What has it done to keep the data up to date? What has it done to prevent criminals from re-registering stolen firearms? Absolutely nothing. The Conservatives love to uphold laws except for the ones with which they disagree. Why did the government not do anything to fix the problems?

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, the answer to my colleague's question is very simple. The registry was so horribly flawed when it came into play that the \$2 million skyrocketed into \$1 billion overnight. Our government did the sensible thing and refused to continue to throw good money after bad to do something that would not prevent crime.

There is nothing in the registry that will ever stop an individual from making a choice to break into a person's home and taking his or her registered gun. That is a decision people make. Criminals are criminals. The registry will not stop that from occurring.

We made the responsible choice of not throwing good money after bad and wasting Canadian taxpayer dollars, and we will continue on that track.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned voting the party line rather than the wishes of the constituents. I have been here for a good seven years and I have never seen a party vote the party line over the interests of the constituents more often than the party opposite, I must say.

Second, in terms of Dr. Mauser, he did not disclose the fact that he was a member of the minister's advisory panel on firearms when he appeared before the committee. In fact, many of the witnesses who appeared were part of the minister's inner circle. It was almost like having the minister's staff appear before the committee. In any event, Dr. Mauser is an advocate of having all Canadians learn how to defend themselves with a weapon, so I do not know if he really represents the views of the mainstream in this country.

The member said that the registry does not work because criminals will be criminals and they do not register their guns. However, the government has maintained the hand gun registry, so would the same logic not mean that it should be getting rid of the hand gun registry?

When the member talked about some of the peer review evidence that was presented to say that the long gun registry does not save lives, those same studies showed that gun licensing does not save lives. Therefore, why is the government not getting rid of gun licensing as well if it wants to be consistent with the so-called peer reviewed evidence that we heard at committee?

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague knows that this is an emotional and heated debate across Canada.

When he talks about taking these giant leaps, that is not what we are doing. We are doing what we heard Canadians say they wanted. Canadians said that they wanted to scrap the registry. I have not heard a mass number of people in my riding or across Canada say that we should scrap the registries for restricted and prohibited weapons. I have not heard a mass number of people talk about wanting to scrap the licensing system, so we have not gone that far and have not made that commitment.

The hon. member will recall that we did hear testimony in committee where people did say that there was not a great deal of justification for even a restricted weapon registry.

We are not prepared to go that far. We are willing to compromise. When the opposition members say that we are not compromising, this legislation is an excellent example of doing that.

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• (1305)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time that I have risen in this House to speak about this bill. Clearly, the first time was at second reading.

If I had to give my speech a title, I would call it “A Mistake that Will Haunt us for Years to Come”.

I believe that the decision to abolish the firearms registry is a mistake. I participated in committee hearings where we heard from a number of witnesses on both sides. I am now more convinced than ever that we are making the wrong decision.

In the 10 minutes that I have this morning, I would like to speak more specifically about certain amendments that others moved today in this House, some of which are practically identical to those I moved at committee on behalf of my party.

Before I begin, I would like to point out two things that I found a bit disturbing about the context in which the debate took place. I mentioned one of them earlier in my question to the hon. member for Yukon, and that is the fact that we learned, following the testimony of a number of committee witnesses and as a result of a question on the order paper, that some of these witnesses had been members of the minister's firearms advisory committee.

I do not know whether you agree, Mr. Speaker, but to me, an advisory committee is a group of people with a variety of opinions on a subject, some of whom may have technical expertise on the issue, which the government consults in an attempt to achieve consensus. An advisory committee is not a club of cronies that the government stacks with party supporters. I think that the minister's firearms advisory committee looks more like a bunch of cronies than a real advisory committee that tries to examine an issue thoroughly.

I thought transparency was lacking. When the witnesses appeared, we were given to believe that they had no ties to government, that they were independent. Naturally, we would have responded differently to their testimony had we known that they were operating hand in hand with the minister.

Then there is the RCMP's annual report on the Canadian firearms program. Quite a trend has been developing over the past few years. The report seems to have been published at inconvenient times for those who are against dismantling the gun registry. For example, the 2007 report was published at the end of August 2008, which is reasonable, but the 2008 report was given to the minister on October 9, 2009, and published after the vote at second reading of Bill C-391, a private member's bill sponsored by the member for Portage—Lisgar that sought to dismantle the gun registry. The 2009 report was published on October 14, and the 2010 report was just published on January 19, well after the committee's hearings on Bill C-19 and well after the vote at second reading held last fall.

• (1310)

[*English*]

I would like to talk about a couple of amendments that were presented today that mirror the amendments that I presented in the name of the Liberal Party at committee.

The first was an amendment to ensure that the data would be saved. The hon. member for Yukon neglected to mention that in the province of Quebec, no mandate was given to the Conservative government to destroy the data. To make the people of Quebec pay again for basically the same data would be a form of double taxation. The Conservative government would be guilty of double taxing the people of Quebec. The people of Quebec have already paid to create the database for the registry. If they wanted to maintain the service of that registry, they would have to pay again. That is not quite fair from a fiscal point of view.

Second, doing away with the database would not only violate the spirit of the Library and Archives of Canada Act but the letter of that act as well. That is why Bill C-19 would have to amend the Library and Archives of Canada Act in order to get rid of the data as soon as possible.

The Library and Archives of Canada Act is important for maintaining records that are critical for the functioning of a democracy. It is central to the idea of access to government information by the people of Canada. Bill C-19 would not require the government to obtain the opinion of the national archivist before rushing to destroy the data.

Suzanne Legault the Information Commissioner said the following at committee:

—destroying records on this scale without first obtaining the consent of the archivist, as required by section 12 of the Library and Archives of Canada Act, not only modifies the existing records management system, which seeks to ensure transparency and accountability in the disposal of such records, but in my view also seems contrary to the Federal Court's decision in Bronskill.

—In that case... Justice Noël stated that the Access to Information Act and the Library of Archives of Canada Act are inextricably linked, such that “Parliament considers access to information in Canada and document retention as essential components of citizens' right to government information”.

To destroy the data would be a very unfortunate thing.

In terms of the transfer of firearms in Canada, I agree that the bill would create a dangerous situation. It would essentially take away all supervision of the transfer of firearms, either by gun shop owners or by individuals trying to sell weapons by phone or over the Internet, whichever way they deemed desirable. For example, it would not be necessary for someone selling a weapon, and that could be over the Internet, to check whether the purchaser had a firearms acquisition certificate. This would be problematic.

The bill says that in the vendor's mind, he or she should be certain that the person buying the weapon has a firearms acquisition certificate. But that could mean anything. That would not necessarily lead someone to check. They could call the registrar to find out, if they wanted to go through the inconvenience. However, the registrar would not have to keep a record of that call. If there were a problem down the road, such as a crime, we would not be able to go to the registrar to help with the investigation.

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My colleagues opposite will probably say that firearms owners are responsible citizens. I would agree with that statement. I said it in my speech at second reading. The people I know in my community who own firearms are the most sterling members of the community. They are volunteers. They are ideal citizens. This is not to impugn people who own firearms.

● (1315)

I would like to give the House an example of how we are leaving the process of transferring firearms wide open. The mayor of New York City asked his officials to investigate how firearms are transferred. In the United States, if people are transferring a firearm, through Craigslist for example, they have to check whether the prospective buyer has the right to own a firearm. The process is a little stricter than it would be under this law. It was found that in, I think, 62% of cases, people disposing of firearms through the Internet or any other way would not bother checking, even when the prospective buyer said, "Look, you really shouldn't sell it to me, I may not get through the check".

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was part of the committee hearings on this bill, as was the hon. member who just delivered his remarks. One of the things I found quite disturbing was the fact that over and over the opposition did more talking and perpetuated myths and half-truths in regard to the long gun registry, than listening to witnesses, especially front-line police officers.

The member opposite raised a question earlier regarding Professor Gary Mauser, a great Canadian who has contributed so much to western Canada and the rural way of life. This minister somehow accused him of being someone who believed that individuals should be able to own firearms. He said he is part of the minister's firearms advisory council. That is a well-known public fact. It appears that the opposition was not prepared for committee, did not do its homework and instead tried to propose mistruths.

Could the member tell this House what exactly he did to prepare for committee, if not find out who the witnesses were and what they were doing?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I take issue with this idea that I did not prepare for committee. I have a thick binder of documentation. I read reports. When people come to committee, the first idea that comes to mind is not to ask if they are members of the Conservative Party or if they are working with the minister on this issue. We expect they will tell us what their affiliations are.

I am not saying that Dr. Mauser is not a good Canadian. I did not say that people who own firearms are not good Canadians. I repeat, the ones I know in my community are sterling individuals. That is not the issue.

The committee hearings were very instructive. As I said before, in reference to a question from the member for the Yukon, we saw evidence from social scientists that the registry does not work. That same evidence shows that firearms licensing does not work. So I do not understand why the government cherry-picks its evidence to suit its political agenda.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member on his speech. Earlier, we heard a member from the Conservative Party rhyme off a list of myths by number.

I have two myths to offer my colleague, and I would like him to say a few words about them. First myth: the Conservative government and the Conservatives stand up for victims. Answer: false, given that two ombudsmen for victims of crime—the current one and the former one—say that at the end of the day, the Conservatives are doing absolutely nothing for victims.

Second myth: the Conservative government and the Conservatives are fighting crime. False: in my opinion, they are making a spectacle of crime. From time to time they use victims and their suffering to try to explain or justify unacceptable bills. The best example is Bill C-10—if memory serves me correctly—with which they are going to completely change the way we deal with young offenders in Quebec.

What does the hon. member think about these myths?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, that is a rather interesting question. We heard that the ombudsman for victims of crime is against dismantling the firearms registry. A representative of victims in Canada is against the government's initiative.

Many myths have been spread by the government, if you ask me. The first myth is that this issue pits rural Canada against urban Canada. In other words, people in cities have no interest in owning firearms, but people in more remote areas need firearms for hunting, as a work tool for protecting their farm from animals, etc. Indeed, farmers need firearms.

However, in Toronto alone, the largest urban area in Canada, there are 287,000 long guns. It is not simply a matter of rural versus urban; it is an issue that concerns urban areas as much as rural areas.

● (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to add my voice to this important debate on the ending of the Long-gun Registry Act. With this legislation we propose to finally remove a measure that has had no tangible benefit in keeping Canadians safe. Rather, it has added unnecessary paper work and placed an unfair burden on law-abiding citizens who have done nothing wrong besides have the audacity to own a rifle or a shotgun.

The long gun registry has played a divisive role in pitting rural Canadians against urban Canadians. It has been touted as a safety measure that protects police even as we hear from the police themselves that it is unreliable and inaccurate. It has been said to save lives. Yet no one has ever presented compelling evidence to that end. Rather, we have heard directly from Canadians and witnesses who have appeared before committee with two clear messages: it is a waste of taxpayers' money and it is ineffective.

Let us consider the cost of the registry.

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The registry was put in place in 1995 with the promised price tag of around \$120 million for start-up costs. Most of this was supposed to be covered by registration and licensing fees. However, in her 2002 report and the follow-up 2006 report, the then auditor general of Canada found that the costs were nowhere near that. She did a thorough review of the cost escalations in her review. She estimated that the cost of the Canadian firearms program was many hundreds of millions of dollars by 2005.

This is an affront to Canadian taxpayers. In a media story in 2003, the auditor general put it this way:

The issue here is not gun control and it's not even astronomical cost overruns. What's really inexcusable is that Parliament was in the dark.

Even more, in 2004, the CBC reported that the cost of the long gun registry was well in excess of \$2 billion. Is it any surprise that these revelations were met with renewed calls to end the long gun registry? The answer, of course, is a resounding no.

Despite the attempts of long gun registry supporters to convince Canadians that the long gun registry is saving lives, there is simply no compelling data to back that claim up. It is clear to many millions of Canadians that the long gun registry is both wasteful and ineffective. It is for these reasons that our government has worked tirelessly since coming into power to end the long gun registry.

If we were to believe the naysayers, we might imagine that eliminating the long gun registry would lead to rampant gun crime and Wild West shootouts in the streets. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we already have many tough and effective measures in place that are helping to prevent gun crime.

There are three key approaches to cracking down on violent crimes.

First of all, something that would not change with Bill C-19, is a strict licensing system that is already in place. To lawfully possess a firearm, every Canadian must be in possession of a valid firearms licence.

Anyone who wants to acquire a firearm must undergo a required Canadian firearms safety course. This is not a quick online quiz. Rather, it is a comprehensive 10 hour classroom course that gives students a working knowledge of the safe handling of firearms. It also ensures that they are familiar with the laws and procedures regarding firearm ownership.

As part of this licence application, every individual is also screened to ensure there is no reason to believe that the public would be in danger if that individual gained a licence. This includes checking the individual's criminal record to see if he or she has been prohibited by law to own a gun or poses any general danger to society.

These are reasonable measures that have been widely accepted by gun owners across the country. As noted, none of that would change with the legislation we are discussing today. In fact, we feel so strongly about the effectiveness of the gun licensing system that we have invested \$7 million annually to improve the screening process for first-time firearms licensees. We believe that this is helping to keep firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them.

● (1325)

Our second area of focus in gun control is the work we have done to ensure that those who commit gun crimes face stiff sentences. We have passed legislation that sets out mandatory minimum prison sentences for serious gun crimes, as well as reverse bail provisions for serious offences. We have put in place laws that target drive-by shootings that demonstrate a reckless disregard for the safety of others. There is now a mandatory minimum sentence of 4 years in prison, up to a maximum of 14 years, for these crimes. That minimum sentence goes up five years if the individual committed the act on behalf of a criminal organization or used a restricted or prohibited handgun or automatic firearm in the progress of the crime. These are tough measures. They send a strong message that those who commit violent gun crimes will face severe consequences.

We have also taken decisive action to ensure that we have the appropriate level of police officers to enforce these tough laws. We have invested in significant funds in helping prevent crime through programs like the youth gang prevention fund and the national crime prevention strategy. We have invested quite a bit in my own city of Hamilton, Ontario, to ensure we keep youth from crime.

The third approach has been to strengthen our borders to stem the flood of illegally smuggled firearms from the United States. We know that the majority of firearms smuggled into Canada are coming across the 49th parallel. Our efforts to crack down on this illegal activity have taken many forms, including the deployment of the integrated border enforcement teams at strategic points along the border, as well as testing new and innovative cross-border policing models such as shiprider to combat illegal smuggling along our borders. Shiprider pilot projects, which involve specially trained and designated RCMP and U.S. Coast Guard officers jointly crewing marine vessels to enforce laws on both sides of the border, have proven to have a direct and measurable impact on cross-border criminality.

Given their success, the Prime Minister and the U.S. president have announced, in the context of a shared vision, that we would look to regularize shiprider operations, as well as leverage the shiprider concept to land-based operations. By working closely with our U.S. counterparts, we can better identify, interdict and prosecute those individuals who attempt to smuggle firearms into our country.

In light of what we know about the long gun registry, we are faced with two choices. We can continue with the status quo, pouring good money after bad into a long gun registry that is in effective and wasteful, or we can do what responsible parliamentarians should do, which is to consider the facts.

Government Orders

In summary, I believe there are three points we must all consider. First, the long gun registry has cost Canadian taxpayers an exorbitant amount of money, far more than they were originally told when it was put in place in 1995. Second, many police officers are telling us that the long gun registry is not reliable, full of errors and has done nothing to keep Canadians safe. Third, there is no statistic showing us that the long gun registry has had any impact in terms of saving lives or deterring individuals from committing violent gun-related crimes.

This is not a matter of partisan or personal views; it is a matter of common sense. The long gun registry has not worked since its inception in 1995. It is not working today and it will not work in the future. I ask all hon. members to stand up for law-abiding Canadians and vote to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing about myths—the seven myths the Conservatives mentioned and those mentioned by the Bloc Québécois. Personally, I would rather talk about the facts. On May 2, 2011, election day, 83.5% of Quebecers decided not to place their trust in the Conservative government or the Conservative Party for various reasons.

The Conservatives are determined to scrap the firearms registry and say “no” to the Quebec government and the province’s elected members, who unanimously want to keep it. They are very competent individuals and no one is playing political games when it comes to this issue. This stubbornness shows a complete lack of respect for Quebecers and the Quebec government.

My question for my Conservative colleague is: why can the government not be reasonable? Why will it not accept the NDP’s amendments, which would keep the registry intact but remove the little snags that bother hunters and certain other groups?

• (1330)

[*English*]

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member, if he looks at the blues, that I never said anything about political games. I said it was a non-partisan issue, and it absolutely is. This is about the safety of Canadians and it is about treating law-abiding citizens with respect and dignity. This is all about that.

The registry is the data. If we are saying we are going to get rid of the long gun registry, then we are going to get rid of the data. That is simply it. However, I did mention in my speech that we were very much for the licensing process already there. We have invested more money into that, and that data is very accurate.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member neglected the evidence that was put forward by the emergency room physicians of Canada, who tracked an absolutely empirical data connection between the time which the long gun registry had been in effect and a reduction in suicides involving long guns? That seems to me to be very convincing evidence as it comes from the emergency room physicians themselves.

Would the member comment on that?

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that an emergency room physician was at committee. No compelling evidence was presented at committee regarding any increase or decrease as far as when the long gun registry came into effect. I think I made it very clear throughout my speech that there was no hard data and, frankly, no anecdotal data saying that the long gun registry had made Canadians safer.

I was in the public accounts committee in 2006 when the auditor general presented her report. At that time, she said that the accuracy of the data was to a point where it could actually endanger people. What I heard today from my colleague was that 4,400 firearms were stolen and were re-registered.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could my colleague expand upon the fact that even when the gun registry is abolished, every gun owner will still have to have a PAL and every gun owner will still have to have a hunting licence so things can move forward in that respect?

Would the member expand upon the fact that all of these safeguards are still in place and still have a lot to do for the safety of all Canadians?

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague that this is still in place. I also mentioned in my speech that this test was not something that people just cruised through. Not everybody passes these tests. It is quite intense and really ensures that people know exactly what they are dealing with, how dangerous a firearm is and how to handle them and that they also know the municipal, provincial and federal laws that govern them.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise and represent my region on an issue that is this important.

Just this past year, Canada shocked the international community at the arms negotiation treaty on small arms. The small arms treaty is vitally important. Every year 740,000 people are murdered in narco-states and places like the Congo, in areas where there is tribal violence, civil war, gang violence, deaths that are caused by weapons that are easily smuggled into these countries.

My hon. colleagues on the other side have this myth about shotguns. A shotgun is like something that is in the painting of Whistler’s Mother, or American Gothic, that it is just a tool, but a shotgun does kill and a shotgun in the hands of a narco-gang is certainly a very effective tool.

When individuals are looking at holding families hostage if they have lost their job, a shotgun is a very serious thing. In the past I have heard it said by some people on the other side that to say, “guns kill people” is the same as saying that pencils cause mistakes. However, when we are dealing with the 740,000 deaths happening internationally because of the small arms trade, certainly people are not going into the Congo with pencils; they are going in there with Mausers, double-barrelled shotguns and whatever they can.

Government Orders

I raise this to explain the back story of where the Conservatives are going with this. Canada had been an international leader in trying to stem the trade in small arms weaponry. Yet when the Conservatives went to the last round of negotiations, they did what they had been doing on all the international treaties. They said that the treaty was too ambitious. They said it was “seeking too much”, that it was too detailed. Then they dropped the other shoe. They wanted an exclusion of all sports and recreational weapons from the small arms treaty.

If we look at the mass killings around the world, they are not just done with AK-47s. If we consider what is a sports or recreational gun, for example, the École Polytechnique weapon, that is a pretty effective weapon if it is in the hands of a drug lord. Canada said at this treaty that it would not sign off on an international agreement unless it excluded all these guns.

Who did the Conservatives take with them as their special expert? They took the Canadian Sport Shooting Association, which is the right hand of the National Rifle Association in Canada.

We see the willingness of the Conservatives to undermine an international treaty that protects people in places like the Congo and Colombia for gun ideology.

We have looked at this gun registry bill. With the another bill, the member for Yorkton—Melville wanted to get rid of the provisions that would make it possible for police to stop gang-bangers who were carrying restricted weapons in cars.

Whenever the Conservatives talk about duck hunters and farmers, they are always using them as straw men to move something else. This time they have moved the clauses in the bill that deal with the fundamental effects of licensing. Because of the trade of weapons, it is important to be able to verify whether someone should actually have a gun. That is an issue of public safety.

In the clauses dealing with the transfer of non-restricted firearms, the verification process is now voluntary. We do not actually have to check. If we do check, and this is the real kicker, the registry is not allowed to keep a record if someone verifies whether someone has a right to have a gun.

I know people back home who have had their guns taken away because they were not mentally balanced enough. However, they could go to their cousins, walk out with guns and they could say they bought them, although they did not have the papers. When asked if they checked, they could say that they phoned the registry, but the registry could not verify it.

What the Conservatives are obviously creating, and it is not an accident, it is the intent of the bill, is a whole black market in the transfer of guns. If there is no ability to check whether people actually made verifications, they can do whatever they want. Lost or stolen guns do not have to be reported, only if they are restricted.

• (1335)

This is also a free pass for the criminals. As it stands now, in northern Ontario when the OPP does a big bust and all kinds of weapons are seized, the guys who are caught with their grow ops and their 25 guns always say they are gun owners, that they own the guns. My hon. colleague would know what this is all about. They

can say they own the guns. When asked for their records of purchase they claim to have lost them. Under the registry right now it is pretty straightforward to find out whether or not they actually own those guns. It is not all that difficult.

The government is going to erase that provision. This is the get out of jail free clause for gun criminals that the government is bringing in. Someone can trade the École Polytechnique gun, or the Dawson shooter's gun and not worry whether they will be double-checked because it will be impossible to check.

I have been hearing a lot of bizarre comments from my colleagues this morning about verifiable data. I have a lot of friends who are in the police force back home. When we go out we talk about their issues. I always ask them about the registry and if they really use it. They tell me they use it every day. They say it is not enough to know that someone is a gun owner. If there is a domestic violence issue and they see the escalating factors of domestic violence to the point that they have to go into a home, they need to know if there are four or five guns in the house. That fifth gun is the difference between life and death.

It is the same issue with suicides. That party over there says there is no evidence whatsoever on suicide deaths. I have seen the suicide deaths in northern Ontario from long guns. It is essential when there is a concern that the police and family members have raised that they know if the person has four or five guns. It is not enough to know the person is a gun owner.

The reality I hear from police officers whom I speak with is diametrically opposed to the line that was taken by the Conservatives' public safety chair, the member for Yorkton—Melville, who wrote to me, figuring that we were going to be on the same side of the Conservatives' policy on guns. He said in his letter to me that we “risk becoming a state where police can dictate our personal freedoms. Why are the police so strident in their quest to keep the registry in place? They won't admit it, but it appears they don't want Canadians to own guns. To that end, they need a database that will help them locate and seize those firearms as soon as the registration expires.”

I am sorry, but that is the stuff of a conspiracy theory. That is not the basis of public policy. The member for Yorkton—Melville believes that the police want to know where guns are so they can come and seize them because they do not believe in the right of people to bear arms. That is the kind of misinformation that I think has created this false crisis.

Government Orders

I have dealt with the gun registry for 15 years. As a gun owner I filled out those first rotten forms that the Chrétien Liberals had brought in. It was a dumb process at the time. It was an onerous process. It was completely inefficient. I saw the growing backlash in rural Canada. I dealt with it as an elected official in 2004. We had numerous problems. The issues of criminalizing, if there was a problem with the registry, were the issues we were hearing. By 2006 I was not hearing those problems. The issues I have heard again and again have to do with licensing. People are concerned about possession and acquisition. These are things that can be dealt with.

What we are seeing here is that the Conservatives have opened the door on a whole manner of other issues. They are using rural Canadians as a front. What they are creating is a process that is going to lead to more deaths, more violence, and more impact on our front-line responders.

• (1340)

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the member's comments quite interesting. The member has a habit of assigning a nickname to just about everyone in the House. I think the flipper dipper might be appropriate for that one. He very obviously told his constituents time after time that he would vote to end the long gun registry. This bill does exactly that. In fact, my Bill C-391 did that.

He turned his back on his constituents. He turned his back on rural Canadians and on law-abiding Canadians. I wonder if the member, the flipper who flipped his mind, could please tell his constituents why he changed his mind and why he did not stand up for those people who voted for him?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for my hon. colleague, but being a comedian is not one of her greatest strengths so she should stick to her talking points. She is probably feeling a little touchy because she did come into my riding with the express job of having me lose my job and I certainly won by a large majority. I would like to thank her because the gun registry certainly helped with all those dumb little attack ads the Conservatives mailed into my riding with those really badly drawn pictures. If those guys are going to do attack ads, they have to hire some credible people.

The question is about suicide and homicide deaths. They have been lying in this House all day.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Charlie Angus: Since 1991 homicide deaths have dropped 65—

• (1345)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Before I go to the point of order which I presume deals with this, I would like to remind the member that there are certain words that are unparliamentary and he should refrain from using them.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have such immense respect for you and I will certainly respect your sage advice as always.

Once again, the Conservatives are playing with the lives of people. Since 1991 deaths by homicide have dropped 65% and suicides by 41%. Those are verifiable facts but they have been

making things up because they want to make it seem that this is an issue that has nothing to do with life and death. Canadians know it does because we are dealing with firearms.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is getting rid of the registry and is saying to the Province of Quebec, which would like to have a gun registry, that it will not share the data. As a result, the Province of Quebec has a choice. It could go to court to fight for its ability to use the registry, or it could recreate the registry. Chances are it will have to recreate the registry, or ultimately give up on it. There is no doubt that Quebec's population as a whole and the Government of Quebec want a registry.

Does the member believe that the Government of Canada should allow the registry to be transferred over to the Province of Quebec? This way the Province of Quebec would not have to spend the money necessary to recreate the registry. It would be able to invest that money in community policing and things of that nature.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I come from a rural area where people had such a bad experience with how the registry was developed. I have heard it said again and again that it should never have cost \$1 billion. We could have spent \$1 billion on a whole manner of other more useful functions than a computer system that took so long to get off the ground.

That being said, when I talk to people in Timmins—James Bay, I say that the Conservatives' solution is to take that billion dollars' worth of records and have a bonfire. People say that is really stupid, and it is. To take a billion dollars' worth of records and say, "What a waste of money" and then to show us what a waste of money it is they are going to set fire to all this data that is being used by the police and could be used by the provinces.

That is the fundamental difference between good policy and Conservative policy. If we have paid for that data and we are using it, we should maintain that data because it is important for public safety.

Hon. Laurie Hawton (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to express my support for Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry act.

I would like to start off by commending my hon. colleague from Portage—Lisgar for all her good work on this file, and especially my hon. colleague from Yorkton—Melville, who has worked so hard on this file for so many years. I would also like to thank the Minister of Public Safety for introducing the legislation and moving us all a step closer to fulfilling one of our long-standing commitments to Canadians.

I am proud to be part of a government that actually follows through on its commitments to Canadians. Our government promised Canadians that we would waste no time in the 41st Parliament before introducing legislation that would repeal the wasteful long gun registry. Today we are delivering on that commitment to Canadians.

Government Orders

Our government is working hard to ensure the safety of our streets and communities. Law enforcement knows this, Canadians know this, and criminals know this. When it comes to the issue of gun crime, this is a government that believes in having effective measures to deal with the issue. We need to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to target those offenders who commit gun crimes and threaten our communities. At the same time we must ensure that millions of law-abiding Canadians are not being needlessly burdened.

As it exists today, the ineffective long gun registry unfairly equates law-abiding gun owners to common criminals. Simply put, the long gun registry targets rural Canadians, farmers and duck hunters as criminals.

Although I have never personally owned a gun, I grew up hunting small game and game birds with my father, brother and uncles. The first long gun I used was an old Cooney single shot .22. Pop guns and the odd rabbit and squirrel felt the impact of my limited prowess. Those were fun and carefree days, but I remember the very serious attention that my mentors instilled in me with regard to safe handling, safe storage and responsibility when handling firearms. The vast majority of gun owners today are the same kind of people and deserve to be treated with respect. I am standing here today as a member of a government that is standing up for these Canadians. It is unacceptable to treat these salt of the earth people as criminals, and we are going to take action. Bill C-19 would put an end to this ineffective and wasteful long gun registry once and for all.

Permit me to highlight the merits of the bill before the House.

This legislation would remove the need to register non-restricted firearms, such as shotguns and rifles. This is good news for farmers and hunters. These folks use long guns as a tool to earn their living, whether through hunting game or protecting their livestock. This is not to say that Bill C-19 would do away with gun control entirely as some would disingenuously suggest.

Let me re-emphasize that Bill C-19 would retain licensing requirements for all gun owners while doing away with the need for honest, law-abiding citizens to register their rifles or shotguns. All of the common-sense regulations regarding training, safe handling and storage would be unchanged.

Bill C-19 also includes a provision for the destruction of all records related to the registration of non-restricted firearms that are currently held in the Canadian firearms registry and under the control of the chief firearms officers. This provision would ensure that for the millions of Canadians who have registered their non-restricted firearms, their private information would not be distributed to other entities.

What we seem to have difficulty getting across to members across the floor is that the data is the registry and the registry is the data. We cannot eliminate the long gun registry without eliminating the data.

Let me be as clear as possible for those listening at home. The government will not allow for the creation of a long gun registry by the back door. This government has heard loud and clear from Canadians who own non-restricted firearms. They want the long gun registry eliminated. They want to ensure that their private information is not distributed to other entities.

Let me pause for a moment to address the issue of the registry data being destroyed. This has certainly been a subject, as I have mentioned, of much discussion in the media, in this House, and in coffee shops across the country. The Minister of Public Safety was very clear about this in his appearance at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I would like to repeat here what he said so plainly about that issue. He said:

The registry is the data; without the data there is no registry. So when our government and our party made the very clear commitment that we would scrap the long-gun registry, that we would end it, implicit in that, indeed explicit, is that we would be destroying the information that's been collected under the authority of that legislation. There's simply no other answer to that.

Let us move on from that discussion to refocus on the task at hand.

The fact is that law-abiding firearms owners across the country welcome this legislation. These owners understand that being held accountable for their actions by requiring them to take responsible measures to protect their fellow Canadians is reasonable. They also understand that being burdened with unnecessary registration and regulations is not reasonable.

● (1350)

Canadians from coast to coast to coast understand the need to ensure that our country has a system of gun control that is both effective and efficient. That is why our government has invested \$7 million annually to strengthen the front-end screening of first-time firearms licence applicants, with a view to keeping firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them. We must ensure there are gun control measures to keep firearms out of the hands of those who threaten our safety and that of our communities.

Measures taken in the area of firearms control should enhance public safety on our streets and communities by preventing firearms from falling into the hands of offenders and setting tough consequences if they do. This is what Canadians expect and this is what our government is doing. Our government is determined to get tough on those who commit crimes, the individuals who use firearms for criminal purposes. That is the most important part of effective gun control.

In my city of Edmonton, as in many others, authorities have been dealing with disturbing levels of violence. The issue is not the availability of guns, and especially not long guns. The issues are more related to the people who are committing these violent acts. I would encourage all hon. members of the House to ask Canadians, particularly those in remote and rural areas of this country, how penalizing law-abiding Canadians on a farm or in the woods would help reduce gun crimes in our urban centres such as Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. Quite simply, it does not.

Government Orders

What members will hear overwhelmingly from Canadians is that now is the time for effective gun control. Now is the time to make sure our resources go toward effective programming that helps prevent crime and to stop penalizing honest, hard-working and law-abiding Canadians. Now is the time for all members of the House to listen to Canadians and eliminate this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. That is exactly what our government will do.

• (1355)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I read the bill, I felt I had to point out that Quebec is working to prevent suicide. This is National Suicide Prevention Week. A study by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec estimates that 2,100 lives have been saved since the firearms registry was implemented.

On average, one in three women who died at the hands of their husbands were shot. Rifles and shotguns are the weapons most often used in suicides, particularly involving youth. This figure has decreased by 64% over the past nine years. There is no evidence to indicate that other methods of committing suicide have replaced the use of firearms. Ten of the 13 police officers who were killed in the past 10 years were killed with long guns.

By insisting that this bill be passed, what message is the hon. member sending to the families who are living with the grief of a murdered loved one, to those who are thinking about suicide and to the police officers who have lost members of their force?

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, the simple fact is that our government is looking after the interests of families. We are looking after the interests of all Canadians.

New Democrats like to quote statistics to the effect that suicide and firearm deaths have come down since 1991 because of the gun registry. What they neglect to say is that for the 20 years before that, those deaths had been coming down as well. It was simply a continuation of what had already been happening 20 years before the long gun registry was put in place. The long gun registry had zero additional impact on that trend.

As with everything, it depends on what one looks at. If one wants to look at a certain amount of data, one will get the answer one wants. If one wants to look at all of the data, one might get an entirely different answer, but we prefer to look at all of the data to get the true answer.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member cited data showing that the registry has had no impact. Is he aware that those same studies show that licensing has no impact? Either the government's position is contradictory or the evidence is contradictory. Which is it? Is the government just cherry-picking the evidence or is the evidence no good?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: The simple fact remains, Mr. Speaker, that since the early 1970s, gun deaths from suicide, murder or violence have been decreasing. The opposition wants to hang the credit for that on the gun registry. That is simply not true. We can have a discussion about registration and other things, if the member wishes,

but to say that the decrease since 1991 is due to the effect of the gun registry is simply false.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it almost seems like the Liberals are negating the whole process of licensing. Although it is not a perfect system, it is a very good system to red flag people who may be in danger of hurting individuals and should never have a gun. That is what we on this side believe is effective gun control, not perfect gun control but effective gun control.

I wonder if my hon. colleague could comment on what the licensing process does in stopping people from getting a gun, as opposed to registration, which does nothing to keep guns out of individuals' hands.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question.

It comes back to what we have been talking about. It is not the object but the people handling the object. I deal a lot with K Division of the RCMP in Edmonton. I deal a lot with the Edmonton Police Service. I go on ride-alongs with them and we discuss these kinds of issues. They tell me that there are about 150 people or so in Edmonton, whom, if they could take them off the streets, the crime rate in Edmonton would go down by about 50%.

It is not the object, it is the people behind it. That is what a good registration system will do: it will identify the people who are at risk of being violent offenders and do something about them instead of chasing farmers and duck hunters. That is simply not the answer.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree that linking statistics to the efficacy of the long gun registry alone is very difficult, as the registry was implemented at the same time as many other changes to firearms licensing and storage, handling, transport et cetera. It is very difficult to establish a causal relationship, I grant that.

However, a study by Institut national de santé publique du Québec estimates that 2,100 lives have been saved by the registry. We do know that on average one in three women killed by their husbands is shot, 88% of them with legally owned rifles and shotguns. Since the introduction of the registry, gun-related spousal homicides are down 50%. Rifles and shotguns are used most often in suicides, particularly involving youth. Those have decreased 64%.

While we cannot make a direct claim about causation, there is a correlation. I am just wondering if my hon. friend has any evidence or data showing that the registry has not helped in reducing those, if he wants to make claim there is no evidence that the registry has assisted.

• (1400)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, we prefer to deal in positives, not double negatives.

In fact the hon. member has made our point. The simple fact is that most of those terrible incidents have happened with legally owned, registered firearms. So how the heck did that registration prevent that crime from happening? It just makes no sense.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY**

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday marked the first Random Acts of Kindness Day in St. Thomas. I was absolutely blown away by the kindness shown.

It was inspired by the life of the late Laurie Houston and initiated by her daughter Carrie, and by Williams Funeral Home director Al Hughson and my FM radio.

Local businesses showed their goodwill by sponsoring a complementary breakfast and chili lunch.

At June Rose Calwood Public School, Ms. Maunu's class performed over 230 acts of kindness.

St. Thomas went well out of its way to be kind throughout the day.

At Tim Hortons a record was set when 25 cars paid for the order of the car behind them.

Even more incredible was the generosity shown by Coad Heating and Air. This local business announced that it would donate and install a furnace for a family in need.

It is these types of things that remind us what it means to be Canadian. I would like to thank everyone who performed a random act of kindness and encourage every Canadian every day to pay it forward.

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*[Translation]***NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK**

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is National Suicide Prevention Week, and I would like to acknowledge the efforts and the exemplary work of all stakeholders, counsellors and volunteers, especially at the Centre d'écoute et de prévention suicide Drummond, which is fighting to eliminate a devastating scourge that affects thousands of Canadians every year.

Heart-breaking human tragedies lie behind the alarming statistics. Consider Marjorie Raymond, the young high school student who was bullied. She believed she could end her suffering by ending her life. Suicide and bullying affect not just the victims, but also their families, their friends and everyone who witnesses them.

Suicide and bullying directly or indirectly affect all of us. We must strengthen the education and prevention programs and provide more support for them. We must show how much we care about the well-being and the personal growth of all Canadians.

As the slogan says, suicide should never be an option.

*[English]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Prime Minister is on his way to China to promote alternative markets for Canada's commodities.

Much has been said about the northern gateway pipeline, which would move energy from Canada to the Asian markets. Those who oppose this pipeline claim environmental concerns but these are not justified.

Farmers and residents in my riding are quite knowledgeable about the latest technology in pipeline construction. In fact, this line would come within a kilometre of my own home and would run right through our family farm, and we have no environmental concerns.

A pipeline to Asia would not only be safe but it would also create thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in wealth. Not only would it create opportunities and new technologies that would keep our air, water and land clean, but also create wealth to establish our social programs for generations to come.

The official opposition in the House wants to shut down both the pipeline and the entire oil sands industry in Alberta. This is driven by ideology, not logic; by fear-mongering, not science. This is just an example of how really out of touch it is.

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*[Translation]***NORTH BAY WINTER CARNIVAL**

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our former colleague, the former member for North Bay, Anthony Rota, asked me to talk about the largest francophone festival held outside Quebec. The 49th annual Carnaval des Compagnons, which takes place every year in North Bay, will be held from February 3 to 12. This cultural and social activity is a major event that has been bringing the region's francophone community together since 1963. For 10 days in a row, all sorts of shows, sporting events, plays, traditional meals and a wide range of family activities take place. For many, the carnival's main attraction is the mascot, Bonhomme Carnaval, whose identity is never revealed until the last day.

The North Bay Carnaval des Compagnons is a magnificent festival that celebrates francophone culture. I want to congratulate this year's organizers and encourage all Canadians to put on their toques and mittens and come enjoy the carnival in North Bay.

* * *

● (1405)

*[English]***INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CO-OPERATIVES**

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations has recognized the global importance of the co-operative business model by declaring 2012 as the International Year of Co-operatives with the theme, "Co-operative Enterprises Build a Better World".

Statements by Members

Co-ops are guided by voluntary and democratic membership, concern for community, and decision-making by consensus and participation in the local economy.

As a government, we especially appreciate the value that co-operatives provide to rural and remote communities in creating jobs and providing essential services.

There are more than 9,000 co-ops in Canada, many of them owned and controlled by first nations, Métis and Inuit people.

I would ask the membership of the House to please join me as we celebrate the International Year of Co-operatives.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, in Geneva, Switzerland, 16-year-old Chelsea Edwards from Attawapiskat is leading the delegation of first nations children who will tell the international community how they have been systemically discriminated against by the government.

Education is a universal human right and Canada is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The government has a legal obligation to protect the equitable education rights of all but it has failed in this job. Nowhere is this failure more noticeable than in the mistreatment of the children of Attawapiskat: 12 years without a school; 12 years of broken promises.

No wonder the late Shannen Koostachin stood up to the government and said that the children had suffered enough. She knew that children have only one childhood. It is a precious resource that cannot be squandered under the substandard buildings, third-rate education and broken promises of the Conservative government.

Shannen had a dream that all children have the right to an education in a safe and comfy school. Meegwetch to our youth leaders who are making Shannen's dream a reality at the United Nations today.

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ELEVATION TO CARDINAL

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I express my sincere congratulations to Toronto's archbishop, Thomas Collins, on his upcoming elevation to cardinal.

As this country's 16th cardinal, Archbishop Collins will become the primary spokesman for the church in English Canada. He enters the College of Cardinals as Canada's third active member, joining Cardinal Marc Ouellette, president of the Congregation of Bishops in the Vatican, and Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte, the Archbishop of Montreal.

Archbishop Collins' appointment is a wonderful reflection on him personally, on his character, his capabilities and his contributions to Canada and to the church. It also recognizes the importance of the Archdiocese of Toronto, which is home to more than one million Catholics.

In addition, Archbishop Collins' elevation to Cardinal is a great honour for Canada; a tribute to our country in the eyes of the Holy See.

As a Roman Catholic member of Parliament, I look forward to celebrating this great event in Rome on behalf of Canadians this February 18. May God bless and guide Archbishop Collins in his new responsibilities as a cardinal.

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QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to commemorate and celebrate the 60th anniversary of the ascension of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to the Throne as Queen of Canada. This is an occasion marked only once before by her great-great grandmother, Queen Victoria, in 1887.

It is well-known that Her Majesty is the patron of over 600 charities and other organizations. To celebrate her 60 years of selfless service and devotion to duty, Governor General David Johnston has announced the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal as a visible and tangible way to recognize outstanding Canadians of all ages and from all walks of life.

These medals provide an opportunity to honour exceptional Canadians for their contribution to their fellow citizens, to our communities and to our country.

To that end, I invite all Canadians to recommend potential candidates for these honourable medals and wish Her Majesty many more years of good health.

God save the Queen.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AMÉLIE & FRÉDÉRIK HELPING AGENCY

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a society where inequality keeps growing, some exceptional people dedicate their lives to fighting poverty and isolation. That is why I am taking the time today to recognize the remarkable work done by the Amélie & Frédéric helping agency, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

This organization provides food assistance to low-income individuals and families because, yes, hundreds of thousands of Canadians are going hungry. These people have to count on organizations like Amélie & Frédéric for help because the government is turning a blind eye to this issue, preferring instead to invest in prisons, fighter jets and tax gifts for large corporations. We have a moral duty to invest a tiny fraction of this money to ensure that no one goes hungry.

In the riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, organizations like the Amélie & Frédéric helping agency are showing that solidarity, a listening ear and generosity can change the world one small step at a time. It is by taking small steps that we achieve our goals. I am very proud to pay tribute to this organization today. Happy 20th anniversary to Amélie & Frédéric.

●(1410)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in celebration of International Development Week 2012.

Our Minister of International Cooperation launched this year's celebration under the theme, "I Am Making a Difference".

[Translation]

Over the course of International Development Week, Canadians will have the opportunity to learn more about Canada's role in international development and the significant contributions Canada makes to developing countries. This week, the focus will be on the empowerment of women and girls.

As our government has demonstrated through its commitment to the health of mothers, newborns and children, we believe that empowering women in developing countries is key to reducing poverty.

[English]

This week, Canadians will be able to take part in events across the country, such as the World University Service of Canada symposium and the SickKids International Global Child Health Day.

Canadians are known for lending a hand to those in need. We—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

* * *

JAMES THOMAS LEMON

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Jim Lemon loved Toronto and was known for his intellect and his deep knowledge of Toronto's urban history.

Professor Lemon was a highly respected scholar at the University of Toronto and a Guggenheim fellow. His bestselling book, *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History*, brings the city to life. Jim chaired the Annex Residents Association and led the fight against the Spadina Expressway.

In addition to numerous articles, Jim Lemon wrote the award-winning book, *The Best Poor Man's Country* and *Liberal Dreams and Nature's Limits: Great Cities of North America Since 1600*.

As a life-long New Democrat, Jim was a Toronto school trustee and a candidate for the NDP. Throughout his life, he strove to improve the livability and the health of his neighbourhood, his city and his country.

Professor Emeritus James Thomas Lemon passed away on January 31. We will miss his passion, his intellect and his commitment to social justice. I extend our sincere condolences to his wife of 53 years, Carolyn Miller Lemon, and his children Margaret, Janet and Catherine.

Statements by Members

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last July, the government released an integrated environment monitoring plan for the oil sands. That plan was developed in partnership with leading environmental scientists from across Canada. It outlined all the elements needed to have a world-class monitoring program. Since then, our government has continued working constructively with our Alberta counterparts to build further on that foundation.

On Friday, the Minister of the Environment had the honour of joining Alberta environment and water minister, the hon. Diana McQueen, in announcing the implementation plan of our joint oil sands monitoring system. This comprehensive new plan goes well beyond our existing provincial and federal air, land, water and biodiversity monitoring. As a result, we will be monitoring in more places more frequently for more substances.

We have one of the most accountable and transparent oil sands monitoring systems in the world. Our scientific data will be posted on the web for all the world to see and I challenge other oil-producing nations to do the same. Our government is committed to developing this important resource in an environmentally sustainable way.

My congratulations go to the Minister of the Environment on what can only be classified as the best oil sands monitoring system in the world.

* * *

MARIE THIESSON

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, a celebration of life was held in Saskatoon for Marie Thiesson who passed away on January 26 after a long struggle with cancer.

After working as a stay-at-home mom for 20 years raising four sons and one daughter, Marie returned to teaching at the Saskatoon School for the Deaf. She also gained a Bachelor of Education with distinction from the U of S.

Her interest and specialized training in hearing impaired children led her to the Saskatoon public school integrated program at Brunskill School. As a founding member of the Saskatchewan Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf, her help for the hearing impaired continues.

Co-founder of the Hope Cancer Help Centre, she was awarded Women of Distinction Award honours by the YWCA.

During all this time, she stood by her husband Stuart's work as executive secretary of the NFU and therefore had to put up with farm union activists, of whom I was one.

On behalf of Marie's many friends across Canada, we love her and we will miss her.

*Oral Questions***VICTIMS' RIGHTS**

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has no credibility when it comes to speaking on behalf of victims. It has voted against victims several times in this place. It voted against the elimination of the faint hope clause for murderers and opposed the safe streets and communities act which would give a greater voice for victims in our justice system.

The NDP wants to silence victims, urging a well-known victims' advocate to stop speaking out about Canada's justice system.

Our government will keep bringing forward legislation that gives a voice to victims and that keeps our streets and communities safe for children and seniors.

Instead of pretending to support victims, the NDP should do the right thing for once and vote in favour of victims' rights, rather than against them.

* * *

• (1415)

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four years ago, the Prime Minister went to London to tout his corporate tax cuts. He sat in a locomotive at Electro-Motive Diesel, smiled and waved and assured the workers there that their jobs were safe. Why? Because his Conservative government was giving EMD a hefty \$5 million tax break.

Today, those 500 jobs are gone, shipped abroad because those workers would not accept a 50% pay cut. And that \$5 million? It is gone too. This is the true legacy of the Prime Minister's so-called job creation strategy.

Once a manufacturing giant, London now struggles with closed factories and good jobs that have been shipped away. Thanks to the government's reckless corporate giveaways and hands-off approach to foreign takeovers, thousands of families in London now struggle to make ends meet. The government has failed London workers and their families and it has devastated their community.

The Prime Minister says that he is creating jobs but the truth is that he has simply lost control.

* * *

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, Canada will celebrate a very rare and historic occasion. Sixty years ago, on February 6, 1952, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne as Queen of Canada. For 60 years, Her Majesty has dedicated her service to the people of all the Commonwealth of Nations and has truly exemplified the meaning of public service.

Today, the Governor General and the Prime Minister marked Her Majesty's diamond jubilee by recognizing Canadians who, like her, have dedicated themselves to service to their fellow citizens, their communities and their country.

Throughout the year, our government will celebrate this historic anniversary by supporting local community groups to organize their

own grassroots celebrations, as well as providing learning materials for young people in schools across the country.

Her Majesty's diamond jubilee reminds us of the important role the Crown has played in the evolution of our country. This anniversary is an opportunity for all Canadians to be proud of this institution that has helped define who we are as Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were disappointed when the UN Security Council failed to deal with the crisis in Syria after a veto from Russia and China.

Will the Prime Minister raise this issue in China? What pressure will he exert? In the meantime, the United States has closed its embassy in Damascus and pulled American diplomats out of Syria. Will Canada also recall its ambassador?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has worked very closely with the international community to apply pressure on the Assad regime to stop the slaughter. We have been very clear about this. Assad must go.

That is why Canada announced an evacuation of all Canadians from Syria. Consular services at the embassy are down to a skeletal level. We repeat our call for Canadians to leave Syria as quickly as possible while they still can.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives remain vague about their proposal to overhaul old age security. People are really worried because the government is refusing to answer the question and to be specific.

I will ask a specific question. Will the Conservatives change the eligibility age for old age security? Will the age increase from 65 to 67, yes or no?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will ensure that old age security is sustainable not just for today's pensioners, but also for the next generations. It is very important to ensure that this program is sustainable and available in future for today's youth.

Oral Questions

●(1420)

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Seniors confirmed last week that changes to the pension system will be in the next budget. It is RRSP season. People must have all the necessary information to plan for their retirement.

Will the eligibility age for OAS benefits increase from 65 to 67? Yes or no? When will this measure go into effect? We need to know.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that the old age security program is sustainable for today's pensioners and for future generations. I can tell people who are approaching retirement age that they will not be affected by the changes. We will ensure that people my age and younger people have the opportunity to prepare their retirement plan as soon as possible, before they retire.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we cannot protect future generations by taking away their retirement security. There is no leadership here.

Even in London, Ontario, labour, businesses and citizens are showing leadership where the government has failed. Mark's Work Wearhouse is giving Caterpillar the boot at their stores. Four hundred sixty-five families lost their breadwinner in London last Friday. Unemployment continues to rise across this land.

When is the government going to show leadership? When is it going to work on a jobs plan so Canadians can get back to work?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we remain focused, of course, on jobs and economic growth. Those are the fundamental concerns of Canadians, ensuring that we have a sustainable path for social services in the country, whether it is health care, or social benefits or pension benefits to ensure that in the long term Canadians can look forward to having the benefit of those programs and not an irresponsible attitude like the member opposite demonstrates that only looks at tomorrow morning and does not look down the road.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the long term Canadian families are going to be a lot worse off under the government.

Conservatives gave Caterpillar \$5 million. Now the Prime Minister was willing to use the workers as an election prop for his photo op. Now that those same workers are out on the sidewalk, he just drives right by in his limousine.

The government has thrown millions of dollars away. What we have are plant closures and jobs going south: White Birch, Mabe, AstraZeneca and now Electro-Motive.

Why is the government dropping the ball? Where is the jobs plan for our hard-hit communities across the country? Where are the jobs?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my car is actually a Chevrolet Impala from Oshawa, Ontario. The

member opposite will recall voting against our plan to save General Motors and the 400,000 jobs in the auto sector across the country.

I know my friend opposite is a student of parliamentary history and I know he wants to remember, he just forgot to say so and congratulate the Prime Minister's government on its sixth anniversary of being sworn in as the government of Canada, an excellent government especially.

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PENSIONS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government spent the last week trying to prepare people for a change in old age security, a change presumably in guaranteed income supplement. No one is quite sure exactly what the Prime Minister was talking about in Davos.

I would like to ask the government today if it could at least make a commitment that none of these changes that it is talking about will take place until after 2015, so, at the very least, Canadians will have an opportunity to vote on the changes being imposed on them by the government.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and I have been very clear all along. Anyone who is currently accessing old age security or GIS benefits will not be affected by the changes. Anyone who is nearing retirement will not be affected by the changes. We have also reassured Canadians that anyone who is young enough, like myself, or people younger than I, will have time to adjust their plans for their own retirement. We are going to ensure that they do have the time to do that.

●(1425)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not about to ask the minister how old she is.

[Translation]

At the very least, the minister should clearly state that the government does not intend to make changes to OAS, the GIS or other programs for seniors before the 2015 election so that people can vote for or against the government's plan.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure Canadians who are currently receiving pension benefits that they will not be affected. I can also assure people younger than I that they will have enough time to adjust their retirement plans to deal with any changes.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to put an order paper question on that subject, but I do want to switch the subject slightly to the Caterpillar question, because it is a critical question.

Oral Questions

I want to ask the government, first, whether it will table all of the decisions with respect to the approval of the foreign investment by Caterpillar in the Electro-Motive company. I want to ask the minister very directly how it could be that the government could have allowed such an investment without receiving guarantees from the company with respect to its future intentions, a hugely profitable company, a hugely profitable operation in London, shutdown, workers left to the side, all that intellectual property going down to Indiana. Where was the government? What—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, about Caterpillar, the member is talking about a deal American to American, so this transaction was not reviewable under the ICA.

However, in the London area, for example, we recently announced a contract with General Dynamics that protected 2,200 jobs. We will continue down that road. We will keep a low fiscal framework and we hope those members will vote with us to ensure we can ensure economic growth and job creation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the closure of the Caterpillar plant in London proves that blindly cutting corporate taxes does not work. After making record profits in the last quarter, the company decided first to lock out its employees and then to put them out on the street. Some 450 jobs are going to the United States. In December, Electrolux closed its plant in Quebec and 1,300 jobs were lost.

What is the government doing for the laid-off workers, besides giving tax credits to create jobs abroad?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, we sympathize with the workers. We have empathy for them. What is happening to them is not funny. It is terrible. However, we must continue to take measures that can promote economic growth and create jobs. That is why we have adopted tax credits for hiring workers. We have also adopted an accelerated capital cost allowance rate of 50% to allow investment. We have put more money into workforce training and skills development. We continue to take measures to promote more openness on the markets in order to create jobs and economic growth. However, those members keep voting against such measures.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they say they are creating jobs, but those jobs end up going abroad.

The empty answers from this government do not change the situation for the Canadian families who are suffering as a result of the 40,000 manufacturing jobs that were lost in Canada last year. The Conservatives are standing idly by. When Mabe Canada pulled the same stunt in Quebec, the provincial government took a stand and asked for a \$2 million reimbursement.

What are the Conservatives going to do to protect good jobs from the despicable and unacceptable practices of these companies?

• (1430)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be consistent here.

Our economic action plan has created more than 600,000 net new jobs in Canada. When we make such targeted investments in order to make economic growth last in Canada, what do those members do? They keep voting against such investments. The hon. member can get all worked up here and cry foul.

We empathize with these families. What they are going through is terrible, but they can rely on the government to do the opposite of what those members are advocating, which is to increase taxes by more than \$10 billion. That is irresponsible and it makes no sense.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. The people of Homs continue to be shot and killed. What measures has the government taken to react to the most recent developments? In particular, why has the government not recalled our ambassador to Syria, which would send a clear message to the Assad regime?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has sent a very clear message to the Assad government that the killing must stop now and to bring reconciliation, Mr. Assad has to go. That is the very clear message from the Government of Canada to the government of Syria. Our Ambassador there is passing on this message very strongly to the government of Syria.

However, Canada announced last week that we would reduce diplomatic staff at our embassy in Damascus to core personnel only. The safety of Canadian staff in Syria is our number one priority.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, reducing staff in the embassy is one thing but recalling the ambassador would send a real message.

The Prime Minister has a unique opportunity, over the course of his trip to China, to raise the issue of Syria with the Chinese authorities. What concrete action does the government intend to take to persuade China to get on board with international efforts, particularly those of the Arab League?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has sent a very clear message to the government of Syria. President Assad must go, Canada wants reconciliation and the killing must stop now. We are working with our allies to put pressure on the Syrian government.

As far as China is concerned, the Prime Minister will discuss a whole range of issues with our hosts, including the situation in Syria and Iran.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the government's trade agenda in Washington collapsed, we all know it is desperate for a win. However, as Conservatives go to China, they should be mindful of their bad track record as trade negotiators.

Canada's manufacturing trade deficit has swelled drastically under the Conservatives, from \$16 billion to \$81 billion in five years, costing thousands of good quality Canadian jobs.

With the Prime Minister in China to talk trade, where is the Conservative plan for protecting our manufacturing sector?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is our Conservative government that has aggressively pursued Canada's trade expansion in China. We have secured approved destination status for Chinese tourists. Two-way trade is now almost \$60 billion. That is up from \$36 billion under the Liberals.

I can guarantee one more thing. We will take no advice on trade from the NDP members. They have voted against every trade agreement we have brought to this place.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, misplaced partisanship will not help unemployed Canadians. The reality is our trade deficit keeps going up and the unemployment rate keeps going up. Those Conservatives have not got the job done. Canada is more than just raw logs and unprocessed oil. Under the Conservatives, Canada's value-added manufacturing sector has been gutted, with more jobs lost every single month.

Will the government ensure any trade deal with China will help hard-hit Canadian communities that rely on a strong manufacturing sector? It is time to stand up for them.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the real difficulty here is the NDP trade agenda has absolutely zero credibility. It is a heresy issue. We stand up for Canadian workers every day by pursuing a trade agenda abroad to guarantee—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise at that end of the chamber. The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, we guarantee jobs here at home by pursuing a trade agenda abroad, which is something the NDP will never understand.

* * *

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of International Cooperation told the House that the government has no intention of reopening the abortion debate, but today, Canadians are hearing quite another story.

In a press conference that was disturbing, to say the least, the member for Kitchener Centre said that he wants the House to reconsider the definition of “human being”.

Once and for all, will the government keep its backbenchers in line and unequivocally protect women's reproductive rights?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been very clear: the government will not reopen this debate.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): The problem is, Mr. Speaker, it is not open, but we keep talking about it.

[*Translation*]

Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Gatineau.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Canadians are well aware that this is a serious situation. Either the government has lost control of its caucus or it supports the comments the member made this morning, which would be vile.

The member has levelled a direct attack on women's right to choose. If the government is serious about not reopening the abortion debate, why is it so reluctant to say so? Why not make it loud and clear?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that people will probably continue to debate, but I will put my money on the Prime Minister. He has said very clearly that we have no interest in this debate.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, women across Canada today are facing the return of a battle we all hoped had ended years ago. The Conservative member for Kitchener Centre is reopening the debate on a woman's right to choose. Canadian women see this for what it is, an attack on our reproductive rights and on our bodies.

Silence from the government is not enough. Its claim of not reopening this old debate is not enough. Will the government stand and pledge to vigorously defend women's rights against these attacks?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has enacted many pieces of legislation that better protect women and victims in this country. We have no lessons to learn from that party. With respect to the subject that she was just talking about, the Prime Minister has been very clear: the government is not reopening that debate.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last year, over 60% of the jobs created in Canada have been in just one province, Alberta, but outside of the oil patch, the economic recovery has stalled. Last year, Montreal lost 36,000 jobs and Toronto lost 45,000 jobs, which pushed the unemployment rate in those two cities over 9%. In rural Canada and places like the Annapolis Valley, we are hemorrhaging jobs.

With most of the country still shedding jobs, will the finance minister offer a real jobs budget instead of just a cuts budget?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to offering a budget to this House that concentrates on jobs and economic growth. In fact, we did that last March and the member opposite voted against it. That is why he is sitting way down there rather than over here where he used to sit.

We will concentrate on jobs and economic growth. I would suggest to the hon. member that he ought to also.

* * *

PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister touched off a firestorm when he placed pensions on the chopping block. Now in the latest mixed messages coming from the government, the minister has suggested that she will not attack today's seniors, just their children and grandchildren.

While the government takes cheap shots at the seniors of tomorrow, not one Conservative has had the backbone to protest. Will even one Conservative stand today, remove the muzzle and fight for his or her constituents?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear that we are going to protect the seniors of today, but also future generations.

I would like to read a quote:

Canada, like most countries in the industrialized world, must confront the dynamics of an ageing workforce now or risk being left behind when the current generation of workers begins to retire in the coming years. It is a challenge we simply must meet.

Do members know who said that? It was the Liberal member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

● (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, during an interview this past weekend, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development could not explain the changes

this government plans to make to old age security to the many worried Canadians.

What is now very clear is that the Conservatives want to balance their budget at the expense of the poorest workers. Nine out of 10 of the 4 million Canadians who will turn 65 in the next decade will be entitled to old age security, over half of them having an annual income of less than \$25,000.

How can this government justify attacking our poorest seniors?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. At present, for every pensioner there are four people in the work force. In the future, there will be only two people in the work force for each pensioner. The old age security system cannot sustain this. That is why we must act now. That is what we are doing. We will protect pensions for today's pensioners, but we will also ensure that we have an old age security system for future generations.

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DEFENCE CONSTRUCTION CANADA

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a report released to the public reveals serious irregularities and collusion in construction projects managed by the crown corporation Defence Construction Canada.

Apparently, problems with overbilling, doubling up on labour and shoddy work are systematic. The report describes work that was too expensive, poorly done and even botched on 17 military bases across Canada.

Why does Defence Construction Canada not seem to care about taxpayers' money?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly we have an obligation to ensure we get the best value for the taxpayers' dollars.

I have to say we have not received a copy of the report from the union yet, but when we do receive it, I can ensure that any documented allegations will be investigated by my department. Importantly, the Auditor General is already conducting an audit of defence construction management. I will ensure that any documented allegations are brought to the attention of the Auditor General's office.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that we are talking about serious allegations of shoddy work done on military bases across Canada.

For instance, one contractor allegedly charged nearly \$22,500 to replace a floor and do some tile work. Another contractor allegedly installed bolts in the wrong location on a building's foundation and instead of fixing his mistake, chose to simply cover it up.

Why do these contractors seem incapable of getting the job done without overcharging Canadian taxpayers?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have not received the report from the union yet, but when we do receive any documented allegations, we will ensure that they are investigated and I will communicate those documented allegations to the Auditor General's office.

It is important also for the member to know that Defence Construction Canada is bound by the Financial Administration Act. It also has its own internal audit mechanisms and is also audited by the defence department.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, contractors doing work on a military base in Saskatchewan reportedly doctored invoices to pad their bill, and the same contractor allegedly charged Defence Construction Canada more than \$2,800 for small tools.

Who in his or her right mind hires a contractor that does not even have the tools to do the job?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we feel very strongly that the government has an obligation to ensure that we get the best value for taxpayers' dollars.

It is important to note that while this report has been shared with the media by the union, it has not been shared with us. As soon as we receive it, I can assure the member that any documented allegations will be investigated by the department. We will also communicate those documented allegations to the Auditor General's office which, as I mentioned, is undertaking an ongoing audit right now of defence construction infrastructure.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to get a clear answer. If I am hearing the minister correctly, is she agreeing that the document that was tabled by the union, the full report, will be referred to the Auditor General with a request by the government that he look into this matter to get to the bottom of it? Is that exactly what the minister is committing to here today?

• (1445)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, it is important that my department receive the report.

As I said, not only will Public Works investigate these, but it is important to note that the Auditor General is already conducting an audit of defence construction management. I cannot direct the Auditor General to conduct an audit. What I can do is ensure that any of these documented allegations are brought to the attention of the Auditor General's office. I have committed to doing that.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to protect the integrity of our immigration system. That is why we developed the wanted by the CBSA program. With the assistance of the public, we have been able to apprehend numerous individuals who are in Canada illegally. We have sent a clear message that if an individual

is a threat to the security of law-abiding Canadians, that person is not welcome.

Could the minister please give the House an update on this program?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased with the success of the wanted by the CBSA program. Canadians from coast to coast have co-operated with their local law enforcement officials to remove those who have no business being in Canada. In fact, I am pleased to announce that another individual has been removed from Canada for being a security risk.

Canada will not be a safe haven for foreign criminals. If individuals insist on breaking our laws, our message is clear: we will send them back from where they came.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Finance lectures Canadians about debt, the Minister of Human Resources tells us that the solution to the rental housing shortage is for Canadians to buy a house and take on more debt.

That is not going to help 70,000 Torontonians on affordable housing waiting lists. It is not going to help seniors trying to stay in their homes. It is not going to help middle-class Canadians trying to buy a house in Toronto. The Conservatives have simply failed Toronto.

How can the minister try to peddle a housing plan that her Minister of Finance will not even buy?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a bit confused. Today the hon. member is saying that he wants affordable housing and yet every time we have brought it forward, whether it is through the economic action plan, whether it is through our regular program, the five year agreement that we signed with the provinces and territories on affordable housing, he and his party have voted against every single initiative. That is almost 30,000 projects for the homeless and affordable housing he has voted against. Why is that?

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Toronto cannot even find public money to house the pandas, never mind trying to find housing for the homeless.

After the Minister of Foreign Affairs pulled a Super Bowl size MIA in the city of Toronto, his government refused to fund street car purchases. Commuters have been left idling in traffic jams. Public transit is at a standstill. Chunks of the Gardiner Expressway are falling.

When it comes to Toronto, the government just does not get the job done. Where is the public transit strategy?

Oral Questions

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 MP is mixing her time when she was a city councillor in Toronto. We do not have to manage the City of Toronto. We have to support it in that way. This morning I met with 10 ministers of municipal affairs of the provinces and territories. All agreed on a job well done for the provinces and territories. We will continue to do so.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the current government is also failing Toronto families. Friday's dismal job numbers show that Toronto still faces one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Household debt is skyrocketing because family-supporting jobs just cannot be found. Meanwhile, the Conservatives are sitting on their hands. They are out of touch with the reality in the city.

Where is the plan to ensure that Toronto families can find decent jobs and afford their bills? Where is the plan?

● (1450)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the plan was in the budget last year that the hon. member voted against.

There are more than 610,000 net new jobs in this country since the end of the recession in July 2009.

We are fortunate now in the city of Toronto to have the leadership of a dynamic mayor who is leading the city in the right direction of fiscal prudence. I know “fiscal prudence” are two words that are foreign to the member opposite.

* * *

PENSIONS

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we voted against it because it did not get the job done. Precarious part-time jobs do not get it done.

The government is failing Toronto's seniors too. Seniors across the city are concerned about the Conservatives' attack on old age security and young Canadians are worried about being forced into two more years of work before they can retire just so rich CEOs can get yet another tax break.

Toronto seniors and families are tired of being ignored by the Prime Minister. Will he finally listen to them, protect Canadian pensions and keep old age security eligibility at 65.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the hon. member listen to what has been said here for the last few weeks. We are protecting the old age security system; that is exactly what we are doing. We are protecting the seniors of today who are already receiving benefits and we are going to make sure that any changes have no impact on them or, indeed, on those who are nearing retirement.

What we have to do is to ensure that in the future, for people of the age of the hon. member and for me, there is an old age security system. That is why we have to make changes. In the future there are going to be half as many Canadians working to support three times as much in OAS costs.

* * *

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, six years ago, the Conservative government cancelled the national child care agreement, which would have created a universal, accessible system for all children under five. When it did that, it abandoned Canadian families.

Now that less than 20% of children under five have access to a regulated daycare, will the government take responsibility, take action for all Canadian families, and provide quality options to parents of young children?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we Conservatives believe that parents are the ones who should decide how to raise their children. That is very important to us. That is why we created the universal child care benefit six years ago. We are very proud of that. We have also given the provinces and territories funding to create over 100,000 child care spaces. We are proud of that too.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were distressed by the Russian and Chinese veto of a UN Security Council resolution aimed to implement the Arab League plan to bring an end to the appalling violence in Syria.

Will the government assure Canadians that the Prime Minister will specifically raise the objectionable Chinese veto at the UN on the weekend when he meets with Chinese leaders this week?

Will the government tell us what specific measures it is taking to protect Canadians in Syria and also to protect minorities in Syria who are at great risk because of the rising violence, groups like the Syrian Christian community?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the killing must stop now and President Assad must go. That is a clear message from the Government of Canada.

I would tell the member opposite that, yes, the Prime Minister will be discussing a whole lot of foreign affairs issues with his Chinese hosts, including Syria and Iran.

Oral Questions

We have asked all Canadians who are now living in Syria to leave Syria as soon as possible. We have reduced our staff in Syria to four personnel and we are asking all other Canadians to leave Syria now.

* * *

[Translation]

COPYRIGHT

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 14,000 Canadians have spoken out against the Conservatives' copyright bill. They are unanimous. This bill is an attack on creators' rights and income. The Conservatives are taking \$20 million from workers in the cultural sector in the form of mechanical royalties and \$30 million in the form of private copying rights.

Will the Conservatives once again impose a gag order so that they do not have to debate these major changes, which are of concern to artists across the country—I want to emphasize this—or will they give us the opportunity to amend the bill?

• (1455)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our copyright bill is balanced and responsible. We introduced this bill after consulting with Canadians, consumer groups and creators all across Canada. Our bill will benefit all Canadians. It speaks directly to the needs of artists. This bill makes piracy illegal. We want to make piracy illegal in Canada for those who steal from artists. I hope that the member will support this bill to protect creators across Canada and make piracy illegal in this country.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if that were the only measure, it would be fine but we voted against similar legislation because it was flawed.

The Conservatives are out of touch with the reality of Quebec artists. We saw it in 2008 and we are seeing the same thing with Bill C-11. This bill also attacks students' right to learn, and students are another group that the Conservatives love to ignore. Students who are taking online courses should not be subject to the minister's blind ideology.

Is the government prepared to amend the bill and stop the attacks on creators or not?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that the organizations that represent the needs of students support our bill. They spoke in favour of our bill. They want us to pass this bill in the House of Commons. If the hon. member really has ideas that are key to improving our bill, it might be a good idea for the NDP to support our bill so that we can send it to committee—which is what we want to do—and continue the debate. I hope that the NDP will stop blocking this bill so that we can continue to study it in committee and thus take into account the needs of creators and consumers.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last July the Minister of the Environment announced his intent to implement a joint environmental monitoring system with the Province of Alberta.

At the time the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development said this:

—these commitments hold the promise of establishing a credible, robust, and publicly accessible monitoring system for measuring environmental conditions and changes in environmental quality levels, as well as determining the sources of those changes.

Can the minister update the House on the status of this plan?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his insightful question.

Our government believes that what gets measured gets done. We recognize that we need the best technologies and procedures to collect the scientific information needed to ensure that accountable and transparent monitoring is in place in the oil sands.

Our joint plan with Alberta will result in improved knowledge of the state of the environment in and around the oil sands. Canada is truly at the leading edge of environmental monitoring.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Dr. David Schindler has shown that the oil sands are polluting the Athabasca River. His evidence was so compelling that it forced the government to do a 180-degree flip from its previous position that everything was just fine, thanks very much, with the old industry-dominated monitoring system. The government's view then was that pollution in the Athabasca was naturally occurring, a self-serving myth destroyed by Dr. Schindler's findings.

What will the government now do to bring the situation into line with the Fisheries Act's prohibition against depositing any deleterious substances into fish-bearing waters? Is the new monitoring system just a diversionary tactic—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to answer the rest of his question another day.

Let me correct my colleague's impression that Dr. Schindler is critical of this new program. The government took his best scientific concerns to create the panel that created, by scientists, the monitoring plan for air, water and biodiversity in the area of the oil sands.

I would gladly measure this government's performance when it comes to securing environmental protections in the oil sands compared to 13 years of Liberal lip service.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Service Canada Centre in Rimouski currently has a 25% vacancy rate. The Conservatives now want to move the employment insurance processing centre to the Minister of Industry's riding. With that move, the vacancy rate will increase to 75% and this government will waste \$1.27 million until the lease expires in 2018.

Given that there is a backlog of more than 80,000 employment insurance claims in Quebec, would it not be smarter to keep the office in Rimouski open to address the clear lack of resources?

• (1500)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, we are in the process of modernizing and automating the employment insurance system to ensure that Canadians can receive their benefits as quickly as possible. Modernizing the system is going to take three years. We have a three-year plan to consolidate everything. It is part of our ongoing plan to improve services.

* * *

[English]

DIAMOND JUBILEE

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is a special day. It marks the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty's ascension to the throne as Queen of Canada.

Since 1952, Her Majesty has exemplified the true meaning of public service. Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage please tell the House about the government's plan to commemorate Her Majesty the Queen's diamond jubilee?

[Translation]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this anniversary is truly a unique opportunity for all Canadians to be proud of this institution that does so much to help define who we are as Canadians.

[English]

Her Majesty's diamond jubilee reminds us of the important role the crown has played in the evolution of our country. This anniversary is an opportunity for all Canadians to be proud of this institution that has helped define who we are as Canadians.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are 165,000 families looking for child care spaces today, and across Canada parents are desperate for quality, affordable child care so they can work or finish school. Provinces, local governments and community organizations are struggling to find the money for early childhood education.

An enhanced child tax benefit would better support hard-working Canadian families. When will the minister admit her plan has failed

to improve child care choices for Canadian families? They just did not get the job done.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over here we recognize that there is a difference in what different parents need in terms of child care to raise their children. Some prefer to stay at home. That is fine. Some prefer to have formal daycare. That is fine too. That is why we gave them the choice six years ago with the universal child care benefit. We also gave funding to the provinces to create over 100,000 new child care spaces.

When it comes to enhancing the child tax benefit, we did that too. Sadly, guess what, the NDP voted against every single one of those things we did to help Canadian parents.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday a Conservative senator talked about reopening the debate on the death penalty. Today, a Conservative member is asking that the debate on abortion be reopened by presenting a motion to redefine the concept of a human being.

Is this government doing indirectly what it claims it does not wish to do directly, that is, reopen the debates on the death penalty and abortion?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, we are not reopening the debates on either of those subjects.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Darrell Pasloski, Premier of Yukon; the Hon. Brad Cathers, Government House Leader and Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources of Yukon; the Hon. Currie Dixon, Minister of Economic Development and Minister of Environment of Yukon; the Hon. Mike Nixon, Minister of Justice and Minister of Tourism and Culture of Yukon; and the Hon. Doug Griffiths, Minister of Municipal Affairs for Alberta.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1505)

[English]

VÁCLAV HAVEL

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to mourn the death of one of the great heroes of the 20th century, a great hero of human dignity, the late Václav Havel. Through his words, Havel proved that the dignity and moral worth of the individual could outshine and eventually outlast the vast and oppressive apparatus of totalitarian rule.

As he wrote to Alexander Dubcek, the recently displaced reform-minded president of the Czech Communist Party in 1969, “Even a purely moral act that has no hope of any immediate and visible political effect can gradually and indirectly, over time, gain in political significance”.

[Translation]

These words proved prophetic in terms of Václav Havel's own life. With his strong and vocal opposition to the Soviet Union's invasion of his homeland in 1968, his artistic protests against physical and psychological hardship under the heavy hand of communism and his participation in drafting Charter 77, Havel's life was a series of moral words and teachings followed by virtuous and courageous actions.

[English]

In addition, as foreshadowed in his words to Dubcek, Havel's moral acts, which initially had no hope of any immediate political effect, gradually gained in significance and eventually carried him to the presidency of a free Czechoslovakia. By insisting on raising a moral, human voice in defiance of a soulless and inhuman ideology, this unlikely politician became one of the 20th century's great statesmen.

We were honoured to receive then former president Havel in the chamber during a joint session of Parliament. In the same year, he was also honoured as a Companion of the Order of Canada. I will forever remember being deeply moved by his testimony before us. He brought us back to first principles in saying:

Human liberties constitute a higher value than State sovereignty... the provisions that protect the unique human being should take precedence over the provisions that protect the State.

In word and deed, Havel gave practical expression to these noble principles. As the Prime Minister said upon his passing in December of last year:

The world owes a great debt to Václav Havel. In helping to free his own people he helped spread freedom across an entire continent, and showed us all that even an evil dictatorship can be no match for the power of the human spirit.

On behalf of the government and, indeed, all Canadians, we pray that this great champion of human dignity and freedom rests in peace.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it truly is a great honour for me to rise today to pay tribute to one of the great figures of our era, Václav Havel.

Routine Proceedings

Václav Havel is not only a key personality in modern history, but also a man who, throughout his life, was the incarnation of the spirit of justice and resilience.

As the founder of Charter 77, Václav Havel was at the centre of the fight against the injustices committed by the communist regime. He fought inequality and defended the ideals of civil society. Repeatedly accused of subversion, he spent nearly five years in prison, and his writings were banned. Nevertheless, his voice was heard, and his writing about nonviolent resistance played a decisive role in the Velvet Revolution, an extraordinary revolution that took place without a bloodbath.

His prominent role paved the way for him to be chosen, even by his enemies, as the first president of Czechoslovakia, a position that he had not sought—Václav Havel was not after power.

As president, he stood up for the rights of the Roma, fought against corruption and defended the most underprivileged in society. For Havel, as he remarked in his maiden speech as president, “politics can be not just the art of the possible, ... it can even be the art of the impossible, namely the art of improving ourselves and world in which we live”.

When we think of Václav Havel, we often think about his achievements as a political leader, but it must not be forgotten that he was also an artist. A man of the theatre, a poet, and essayist; all of his achievements demonstrate his great humanity.

Václav Havel inspired millions of people. As we remember him today, let us consider his most famous words, which practically became a slogan, “Love and truth must triumph over hate and lies.”

On behalf of all NDP members, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the family of Václav Havel, and to the Czech people. He will be sorely missed.

● (1510)

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House for giving us the opportunity to take this moment to celebrate the life of Václav Havel and to recognize the significance of his passing.

The end of the 20th century saw dramatic changes. Most of us growing up through the latter half of the 20th century would not have believed they could have happened in the way in which they happened.

The first was the end of apartheid. We associate this with the name of Nelson Mandela who is still with us. His remarkable leadership stands out as a real triumph of the human spirit and of the capacity of one person to make a dramatic difference in the life not only of a people, but indeed in the life of the whole world.

The second is the collapse of communism. This did not happen on its own, nor did it only happen because of the power and force of those of us who lived in freedom in the west. It happened because the system was simply unsustainable economically, but more and more it became clear to people that it was unsustainable from a moral perspective.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

There is no other person who has demonstrated better than Havel that communism was, first and foremost, not only a system of oppression and dictatorship, but also one of lies, and one that was systematically founded on the biggest falsehoods of our era.

It was primarily the great artists of the 20th century, the great writers and thinkers, those that had the courage to fight for their ideas, who did the most to bring about complete change in that monstrous systems.

[English]

It was said of Václav Havel that his greatest work of art was his life. In many other societies he would not have lived as a political man. In many other societies, he would have been quite happy to work in the theatre, which he loved, creating great plays and great works of art, writing poetry and plays. Perhaps he would have become a teacher or a professor. In other societies, that would have been allowed. However, he grew up in a society where that was not permitted. He was not permitted to write what he wanted to write. He was not permitted to think what he wanted to think. He was not permitted to say what he wanted to say. He was forced to live a life that became deeply political and that had as much to do with transforming our whole sense of what indeed is politically possible.

As the minister so rightly said, Václav Havel stood for a very simple principle: the values of freedom, liberty and democracy are not culturally relative values. They speak to something universal in the human spirit. States, systems and governments which do not recognize, or which flaunt or oppress, those rights and those abilities to speak eventually must fall. We cannot predict the circumstances in which they will fall or change, but fall they must. This great growth of this spirit of freedom and the spirit of liberty and the spirit in our time, which is that people have a right to speak, is a spirit which is alive today. It is alive in Burma, it is alive in Syria, and yes, it is alive in China. It is alive in all parts of the world where people cannot speak their minds, where people are told what to think and where the government lies to them, not on occasion and not by mistake, but systematically. That is how those systems keep going.

Therefore, to those people who are living in oppression in societies throughout the world, the life of Václav Havel is a life not only worthy of study but worthy of honour. It is right and appropriate that the House take just a moment to reflect on the importance of this great man and this great life.

●(1515)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a few more words to the wonderful tributes that have poured out from our hearts here in the House today at the loss of Václav Havel. I have only one—

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands have the unanimous consent of the House to respond to the ministerial statement?

Some hon. members: No

The Speaker: There is no consent.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to its study of Chapter 4, Programs for First Nations on Reserves of the 2011 Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to Bill C-288, An Act respecting the National Flag of Canada. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

* * *

[Translation]

PAY EQUITY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS ACT

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-389, An Act to implement the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise in the House today to introduce this bill, although I do so with great sadness. It is an honour because it is always a pleasure to introduce something that will advance the status of women in Canada. However, I am also greatly saddened by the fact that these recommendations were published and tabled in the House back in 2004, but they have yet to become law. Instead, they were offhandedly pushed aside, even though so many women remain underprivileged.

I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for her support and my hon. colleague from London—Fanshawe, my predecessor as NDP critic for status of women, for her tireless efforts.

The sole purpose of this bill is to implement the recommendations made in 2004 by the task force created in 2001. That was over 10 years ago. I know things do not happen quickly in this House, but it would be good if we could do something in less than 10 years to help all Canadian women, who still earn only 73¢ for every dollar that men earn.

Pay equity is a fundamental principle of law.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

• (1520)

[English]

PETITIONS

HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with over a thousand names in support of my bill, Bill C-322, which basically says that horses are originally kept and treated as sport and companion animals and are not raised as food-producing animals but they are commonly administered drugs that are strictly prohibited from being used at any time in all other food producing animals destined for the human food supply.

As the Canadian horsemeat products that are currently being sold for human consumption in domestic and international markets are likely to contain prohibited substances, the petitioners call upon the House of Commons to bring forward and adopt into legislation Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act, thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption, as well as horsemeat products for human consumption.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition on climate change, our most pressing environmental issue and perhaps the defining issue of our generation. It will profoundly affect our economy, health, lifestyles and social well-being. It requires moral and intergenerational responsibility and how we respond will define the world in which our children and their descendants grow up.

Canadians know about climate change. We have had our climate change wake-up calls: the 1998 ice storm and Saguenay flood,

The petitioners call for national responsibility on climate change, a binding international agreement that keeps warming to 2°C and climate justice.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am please to present two petitions. The first one is on climate change. While this petition was created in the context of the Durban negotiations, my constituents continue to demand that the government do three things.

The first one is to set more ambitious targets to reduce CO₂ emissions to ensure that temperatures stay below 2°C, increased from pre-industrial levels.

The second part of the petition is asking the government to develop a renewable energy policy for the sustainability of our economy.

The third is to demonstrate international responsibility in designing the green climate plan for climate change mitigation and adaptation in the developing world.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present the second petition on behalf of about 260 of my

constituents who are working very hard in support of the creation of a national suicide prevention strategy.

Over 3,500 Canadians die by suicide each year and my constituents feel that increasing stresses in our society have taken a toll on Canadians.

As the Kirby report made it clear, more attention is needed to address this painful issue, especially for those who face higher risk, like youth, isolated seniors, first nations and people in remote communities.

My constituents argue that a national suicide prevention strategy is an essential part of fulfilling our collective responsibility to prevent suicide and promote well-being among Canadians. They ask the federal government to take some leadership on this file.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from the Religious Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in my riding of Kingston and the Islands and their friends and supporters.

The petitioners would like to tell the House that climate change is a moral issue that affects the poor of the world and the people who have the least to do with causing the problem in the first place, and that this is unjust. They wish to tell us that the lack of attention to sustainability and to climate change that we have shown in this country is a symptom of unchecked greed. In the face of this, Canada must lead by example. The federal government has not, whereas the provinces and other jurisdictions around the world have.

The petitioners call upon Canada to sign and implement a binding international agreement to replace the Kyoto accord that will keep the rise in global temperatures under 2°C, as suggested by scientists. They ask for national targets and a national policy to achieve those targets. They call upon Canada to contribute to and support the green climate fund to help poor countries adapt to the effects of climate change.

• (1525)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by the good folks of my riding of Davenport in Toronto. This petition deals with what we call lawful access legislation that the government attempted to introduce in the last Parliament and which we expect it will introduce in this Parliament.

Government Orders

The petitioners state that this legislation would require all telecommunications companies to collect and store personal information about their users and hand that information over to law enforcement at their own request without a warrant. They state that Internet and phone providers would pass the cost of this spying program on to consumers. They state that Canadian authorities have not yet provided the public with evidence that they cannot do their duties without this expanded flexibility. They also state that the Canadian Privacy Commissioner has stated that the legislation would substantially diminish the privacy rights of Canadians.

Therefore, the petitioners in my riding, who have joined over 75,000 others who have signed the “stop the online spying” petition, call upon the Government of Canada to respect the privacy rights of Canadians by maintaining the need for law enforcement to secure judicial warrants before receiving personal information from telecommunications providers.

WINE INDUSTRY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today with two petitions.

I would like to make special mention and commend the hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla who has a private member's bill on the same subject matter as my first petition. It is legislation that should have seen the dustbin of history some time ago. It is the 1928 federal Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act which prohibits Canadian wineries in the 21st century from selling a case of wine to someone from Ontario who is visiting us in British Columbia.

It is about time we decide to allow people in this country to buy wine in one part of the country and bring it to another part. The shipment of wine across provincial boundaries is required to be legalized and freed by this group of very stalwart supporters in my riding and beyond.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from many members of my riding and beyond my riding, but particularly from the Gulf Islands. It concerns Enbridge's supertanker scheme to bring a twin pipeline from Alberta to Kitimat that would ship bitumen crude in waters that have been protected from oil tanker traffic since 1972. It is quite shocking to most residents of British Columbia's coastline to imagine that this could be pushed through.

The petitioners call upon the government to stop being promoters of this project, to step back and wait for the evidence at the hearings, to stop pressing that these hearings on environmental review are taking too long, to respect first nations' rights and to stop promoting a pipeline and disastrous tanker proposal from Enbridge.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the statement made earlier today government orders will be extended by 11 minutes.

The hon. member for Gatineau.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after consideration in committee, the House is now seized, at report stage, with consideration of government Bill C-19, that not only seeks to eliminate references to long guns, but also to destroy the data in this registry.

I would like to begin by highlighting the absolutely extraordinary work done by my colleagues from St. John's East, Surrey North and Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. These members have attempted to convince the government of the defects in this bill. There is, of course, a lot of politicking that goes on in this chamber, but politics is supposed to benefit someone—not necessarily us, but all Canadians, in general.

It is true that since the creation of the firearms registry—and I was not in politics of the time; I was hosting a call-in radio show—everyone has complained, and not just a little. People were not complaining about the registry per se, but rather about how much it costs and how poorly designed it was in the first place. The reason for the creation of the registry was clear. Perhaps this is not repeated frequently enough: there was a mass killing at the École Polytechnique where the now infamous Marc Lépine decided, just like that, to shoot at people for one single reason: they were women. That made people's blood boil. It became a very personal matter in people's eyes.

Nobody in this House, regardless of what side they are on, is saying that they want to put weapons in the hands of somebody who is going to go crazy and do what Marc Lépine did at that time.

Government Orders

The firearms registry was created after a lot of trials and tribulations and hemming and hawing. It was supposed to solve all of these problems. There were problems with the cost of the registry. There were also problems—and this is constantly alluded to on that side of the House—because very law abiding citizens had no desire whatsoever to use a firearm in any dangerous way; they were simply collectors, aboriginals or hunters. The debate then took another turn because people realized that the way the bill was drafted created a lot of problems. In fact, people who had no intention of doing anything illegal could be charged because they had an unregistered weapon in their possession. Basically, there were a lot of problems.

For years, the Conservative government promised at each election, and each year, that when it came into power, it would get rid of the firearms registry and in particular the long gun registry, in order to solve the problem faced by hunters.

What did the NDP team assigned to this bill do when it received Bill C-19? We looked at it in what I would call an intelligent and sensible way. We stated that we understood that the government had made certain promises and we wondered what could be done to try and meet everybody's needs. In other words, we asked ourselves how we would alleviate the fear in the minds of hunters, collectors, and other groups, and remove the idea that they were common criminals. At the same time, we asked ourselves how we could protect the public.

This was of course considered in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. The committee, as its name suggests, is responsible for the public's safety. This is the perspective from which we considered Bill C-19.

The committee studied the bill, and now it is before the House at report stage. Colleagues from other parties presented amendments. For technical reasons, the NDP cannot present amendments in the House because it already did so in committee. The amendments had to be presented by other parties. Regardless of who presented the amendments, they were presented not to irritate Canadians or the Conservative government, but to help improve this bill.

• (1530)

That being said, every time an amendment was presented, it was flatly dismissed. The government never even tried to understand why the amendment was being presented. Since we began studying Bill C-19, associations of chiefs of police and various provincial ministers have said that they would like to maintain the information in the registry. I am not the one who said that; I am not an expert on the subject. They were the ones who explained what they do with the gun registry and the data, which are not perfect, of course.

All the same, as I have said since the beginning, no one can plead his own turpitude. The government itself imposed a moratorium on updating the data. That is why some data are not in the registry. It may not be completely up to date, but if it can save just one life, I think it would be worth the effort.

This government is so deeply ideological that it refuses to listen to reason. That is what makes me so sad about this debate. Since the beginning, I have tried to be as open as possible to the arguments on both sides, beyond the promises politicians sometimes make to the people. That is called leadership. We might have some of the same

ideas as our constituents, but we have to take action when we know that something is illegal and that it will cause a problem.

The Quebec public safety minister asked that the data pertaining to Quebec be transferred. This is harmless and does not bother anyone. Quebec wants to maintain the registry and assume the costs. It would not cost the federal government one cent. It would cost even less than destroying the data. In fact, we have been told by information privacy experts that destroying the data will be quite the job. You do not just push a button and say it no longer exists.

Millions of pieces of data are used by our police forces. People who oppose the registry may be convinced to say they have never used it. People told us that they do not use the data, but, if it at least protects the public, it is worth it. We now know that some types of long guns will no longer be tracked after the data are destroyed and the long gun registry abolished. The minister opposite has made this the fight of her life, and whether she likes it or not, we will no longer know where these guns are. Do not bother showing me the proof of purchase because if someone decides to transfer their gun to someone else, or if I knock on my neighbour's door and tell him that I like his gun and want to buy it, there will be no record of it.

There are huge holes in this bill. The government refuses at all costs to listen to reason or to even try to ensure that all the holes will be plugged. This is all I want, and it is all that the NDP, the official opposition, wants.

We must bow to the inevitable. The Conservatives will put an end to the long gun registry but, for goodness' sake, let them plug the holes in the bill and listen to Quebec. Quebec is telling them that it wants to keep the long gun registry. It is not right to claim that the data and the registry are the same thing, and that we need only erase the data to abolish the registry.

The issue was that people were treated as criminals. By removing this criminalization we can solve the problem for those people who are waiting for the bill to pass. At the same time, we can ensure public safety.

• (1535)

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

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First, although we are on different sides on this issue, I appreciate that she has been able to address this and we have been able to disagree in a very respectful way. She was at the committee meetings when front-line officers appeared and told us over and over again that they did not use the registry and, as some of them put it, it actually became a danger to police officers who put any kind of faith in the very flawed data. She admits that the data is flawed. We may have agreements or disagreements on why it is flawed, but it is flawed. We all agree on that.

Would she not agree that front-line officers are putting their lives on the line if they look at that information and put any kind of credence into it when making a tactical decision?

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that is consistent with what I was saying earlier, and I also appreciate the fact that we are able to have this type of discussion.

Indeed, some people came to committee and said such things. The police officers were very clear. Those I spoke to later on, in order to get a better understanding of how the system worked, said the same thing. When they know that a person is in the registry, they are not going to knock on the door or enter carelessly because they saw that there is no registered long gun at that address.

There was an absolutely unfortunate incident, and I do not have enough time to explain how it had absolutely nothing to do with the registry. Facts can be manipulated to make them say what you want.

In committee, I kept asking the same question: if the registry saves just one life, is it not worth keeping? That question embarrassed even the witnesses who sided most with the government's position, and they did not know how to answer it.

Then we were treated to this grand fiction whereby the registry was responsible for a person's death. By all accounts, that is absolutely not true.

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember a bilateral meeting that we had here in Parliament with members of Mexico's parliament. Among other topics, we spoke about the violence in the region and, in particular, the violence in Mexico. One thing that struck me the most was when one member asked what Canada was going to do after it eliminated the firearms registry. The illegal export of these weapons to Mexico was now going to be even easier. What did Canada intend to do in this regard?

What does the hon. member think we should tell Mexico?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I am short on answers, which is rare for me.

Honestly, this is a real problem. Some senior public servants are saying that Canada will even have a lot of difficulty respecting some of its international firearms agreements. These are other concerns, other loopholes in the legislation that we have gone to great lengths to try to fix.

When someone completely closes the door on all positive suggestions, it is quite difficult to break down that door. Unfortunately, the legislation will have to be amended a few years

from now when all the problems it will have created have come to light.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for many years now law-abiding Canadians who use rifles and shotguns for legitimate reasons have spoken out against the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry created in the 1990s by the former Liberal government.

Last May, this government promised to end the long gun registry once and for all. In the Speech from the Throne we repeated this pledge to Canadians. Now with Bill C-19, I am proud to say we are honouring our commitments.

We are honouring our commitment to Canadians, and I am very proud to say that I will be honouring a personal pledge I made to my constituents in Wild Rose when I stand to vote in favour of scrapping the registry.

The long gun registry was ill-conceived from the outset. Under the guise of urban gun control, the Liberals long gun registry really only served to penalize ranchers and farmers who required and responsibly used firearms as a tool to do their jobs. As we all know, criminals do not register their guns.

It is important, first to see this bill in context. The proposed legislation builds on a long string of law and order initiatives that extends back over five years. During this time, we have created the mandatory minimum prison sentences for serious gun crimes. We have created a new broad-based offence to target drive-by and other intentional shootings. We have given the provinces and territories more resources for law enforcement. This is to name only a few initiatives.

Canadians gave us a strong mandate to keep our streets and our communities safe, and that is exactly what we have done. In June we reintroduced legislation to tackle the scourge of human smuggling. Last September we tabled the safe streets and communities act. That legislation has a range of initiatives designed to extend greater protection to the most vulnerable members of society, while further enhancing the ability of our justice system to hold criminals accountable for their actions. It increases offender accountability, ends house arrest for serious crimes, better protects society from violent and repeat young offenders, and increases penalties for serious drug crimes.

Bill C-19 as proposed fits in with our effective agenda of tackling crime.

First, it ends the discrimination against rural Canadians for their legitimate use of shotguns and rifles. In so doing, it will eliminate the element of the current gun control system that is the most wasteful and ineffective.

Government Orders

Second, it will retain the tools needed to allow us to focus our attention against real threats to public safety. In so doing, it will free up substantial resources that we can invest to further bolster crime prevention and law enforcement.

I want to highlight evidence that reinforces these arguments, but first let me briefly explain why the bill before us is so necessary and overdue. It is no secret that Canadian taxpayers have long protested the exorbitant cost of the long gun registry, and rightfully so. Indeed, the state broadcaster, the CBC, has estimated that the total cost of the long gun registry is in excess of \$2 billion. This is a substantial sum of course and it is a sum that we could have invested much more efficiently and with much greater impact in either crime prevention efforts or law enforcement.

Still, if the long gun registry actually contributed to enhancing public safety, perhaps a case could be made to keep it. However, the fact is that it has never stopped a single crime or saved a single life. This is not about having a system that is better than nothing. As the chief of Abbotsford Police said in his testimony before the public safety committee, "a flawed system is worse than no system".

Defenders of the registry like to make the case that police consult the registry frequently in order to determine if firearms are present in a residence in which they were called to or are investigating. The fact is that the registry data is called up automatically every time a police officer runs a search from his or her cruiser.

That is what accounts for the number and frequency of hits on the registry, not the fact that police officers are relying on the registry for their safety. Police officers are in fact trained to assume there is a firearm or some other weapon on hand whenever they respond to a complaint. Indeed, it would be foolish of them not to assume there was a firearm present.

Imagine the consequences if police officers fully trusted the long gun registry to confirm whether there was a firearm on the premises, only to find themselves facing down the barrel of an unregistered gun that they could not have detected by searching the registry. As we on this side of the House have said repeatedly, criminals do not register their guns.

● (1545)

On top of the waste and ineffectiveness, the long gun registry places an unfair burden on law-abiding citizens in rural communities, such as people who use rifles and shotguns to protect livestock or to provide food for their families. The ponds and woodlands of rural Canada are a long way from the Jane-Finch corridor. Making farmers and hunters register their long guns will not keep people in downtown Toronto any safer.

While there is no evidence to support the long gun registry, there is plenty to show the long gun registry is ineffective. I will take a few moments to break some time-honoured myths.

First, most violent gun crime in Canada does not involve long guns. Between 1975 and 2006, for example, Statistics Canada showed that the use of rifles or shotguns in homicides declined by 86%. In 2006 alone, three times as many victims were killed with a handgun than with rifles or shotguns. These statistics are no aberration. In 2009, out of the 179 firearms homicides, almost 60% of those crimes were committed with handguns.

Furthermore, where long guns were actually used in violent crime, the vast majority of the firearms were unregistered. Between 2005 and 2009, for example, police recovered 253 firearms that were used to commit a homicide. Of these, less than one-third, 31% in fact, were actually listed with the Canadian firearms registry.

All this means that law-abiding citizens are spending time and money to comply with the law, but at the same time, and this by now should come as no surprise to anyone, criminals who use long guns do not follow the rules of the registry. This goes to the heart of why the long gun registry has never worked.

People who are willing to use guns to commit crimes or engage in violent acts are not likely to be the first in line to register their guns. In fact, it is quite the contrary. The result is an ineffective system that discriminates for no good reason against legitimate long gun owners and does nothing to stem the tide of illegal firearms crossing the border.

With all this mind, I will recap the provisions of the new bill and how it would address these issues.

The most important component of Bill C-19, and the one that has been so long awaited, is the end of the registration for non-restricted firearms. This will relieve the disproportionate burden on rural Canadians and free up valuable resources to invest in crime prevention and enforcement.

At the same time, the bill would retain the gun licensing system, which this government believes is the most effective form of gun control. Licences would still be required to own any type of firearm and applicants would still need to undergo a background check and pass a firearms safety course.

Finally, the bill would address a very important piece of housekeeping. As one can imagine, the registry has demanded mountains of paperwork from law-abiding citizens. This has been a source of contention, and now with the imminent demise of the registry, it has also become a source of concern. Canadians are worried about what will happen with these records. Will they be taken over by another government organization?

We know that the NDP and the Liberals, if given the chance, would overturn the will of voters and resurrect the gun registry. I am pleased to say that Bill C-19 would require the complete and absolute destruction of all records related to the registration of non-restricted firearms contained within the firearms registry and under the control of the chief firearms officers. This would preserve the privacy of all registrants and would give long gun owners the peace of mind they deserve after so many years of exasperation.

The proposed legislation is long overdue. It promises to eliminate a wasteful and ineffective long gun registry that penalizes law-abiding citizens in rural Canada. It would do so without weakening our gun control programs.

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The vast majority of constituents in my riding of Wild Rose have long sought the demise of the long gun registry. In fact, in a survey that I did recently, 97% of them showed their support for ending the long gun registry. I know that many members on the other side are loath to admit it, but they would have to admit, if they were being honest, that many of their constituents have long called for that as well.

• (1550)

I would ask that all members of this chamber join me in supporting Bill C-19 to end the wasteful, ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech very carefully, and I thank him for making it. I must admit, I simply do not understand why he continues to support the bill in its current form, especially since we made suggestions repeatedly in previous Parliaments to try to find some common ground. The main sticking point has to do with decriminalizing the failure to register a firearm.

Many of my friends are hunters, and I completely understand why someone who owns a firearm might feel harassed, or as though they were being treated like a potential criminal, for having to fill out a questionnaire. However, considering the value and usefulness of the firearms registry to police officers, families and even firearms users themselves, since it allows police to intervene safely, why is this government putting our law enforcement officials in danger by excluding these weapons?

• (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the hon. member was paying close enough attention during my remarks, because I clearly addressed the question he has asked.

It is very clear that police officers are trained to always assume there is a firearm present when they respond to a complaint at a residence, whatever kind of complaint it might be. For them to rely on the long gun registry, as many police officers have testified, would be a foolish mistake on their part because the registry data is incomplete. It has been a wasteful, ineffective registry. The police simply would not be able to rely on the data in the registry to keep them safe and to ensure there is not a firearm.

As I stated, in less than one-third of cases where guns were used in violent crimes, they were not registered guns.

It is very clear that police officers, based on their training and based on what they know about the gun registry, cannot rely on the data. That is why we are going to end the wasteful, ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just do not know where to begin with all of the inaccuracies by that member. I guess he believes that by repeating the incantation about the firearms registry it will make it so.

This useful and effective firearms registry accounts for a 23% decline in suicides by firearms. In fact, five times as many firearms-related suicides use long guns as use handguns. It has been effective.

It has been effective in reducing homicides, which have had a 41% decline since 1995, whereas homicides with handguns and illegal sawed-off shotguns have been flat during that time.

There has been so much inaccuracy. I want to ask the member about his comment about how expensive the long gun registry is to maintain. It is the RCMP itself that has said it will save between \$1 million and \$4 million a year to scrap the registry.

I wonder if the member could tell us, with that kind of saving, \$1 million to \$4 million a year, how many years it would take to save up that money to where the President of the Treasury Board could use it, as he did with his Muskoka madness of putting \$50 million into his riding for pork-barrel projects, unrelated to the intent of the funds that he used.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member of the Liberal Party if she could answer a question for me. When the Liberal government brought in the registry, the claim was that it would cost about \$2 million. We all know that bloated to over \$2 billion, a cost overrun of one thousand times.

Imagine what we could have done with that \$2 billion her party's government spent to set up this very wasteful, very ineffective long gun registry. What could we have done with that \$2 billion to prevent crime, to bolster law enforcement in this country? I can only imagine how much safer this country would be if we had used that \$2 billion in a way that would actually improve public safety.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-19, which would remove the requirement to register long guns and would destroy existing registrations.

First, it is important to remember that the gun registry was created in 1995 following the École Polytechnique tragedy. As a woman who grew up and went to university in Montreal, I am very familiar with that event. Just as tragic is the government's failure to learn from it. I would like to quote Nathalie Provost, a survivor of the École Polytechnique massacre:

The firearms registry is a practical means that Canadian society has developed to try and prevent another slaughter of the magnitude of the one that occurred at Polytechnique. In honour of our dead sisters, we tried to take concrete actions that would meet a real societal need.

I believe that gun control is one of the most effective ways to prevent crime, particularly violence against women. According to a study by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec, an estimated 2,100 lives have been saved since the introduction of the gun registry. I would like to quote the Government of Quebec's advisory committee on domestic violence:

Eliminating the gun registry, a tool that helps authorities prevent and intervene in domestic violence, would be a major loss. The police use the gun registry every day when they are called on to intervene in domestic violence situations and when the courts order the seizure of firearms.

One-third of all women killed by their husbands are shot to death. In most cases, the murder weapon is a legal rifle or shotgun. Since the introduction of the gun registry, the incidence of spousal murder has dropped by 50%.

Quebec's National Assembly has spoken out in favour of maintaining the gun registry several times since the Conservative government was elected in 2006. Recently, the Government of Quebec clearly stated its intention to take on more responsibility with respect to gun control. The federal government refused to cooperate, so on December 13, 2011, Quebec's public safety minister, Robert Dutil, announced that he would ask the courts to prevent the abolition of the registry and preserve the files therein.

In order to avoid having to start again from scratch, the Government of Quebec would simply like to have access to the existing information. After all, Quebec taxpayers helped pay for the creation of this registry. However, for ideological reasons, the Conservative government stubbornly insists on destroying that information. What a waste. It makes no sense to simply destroy this information, which is so useful to police officers.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police specifically asked the Conservatives to keep those records and make the information available to police forces in an effort to help save lives and trace guns. I recently received a letter from the president of CAW local 1004, Michel Lepage, who criticized the Conservative government's wastefulness. I would like to quote a few passages from the letter, because I think it shows a great deal of common sense:

This bill is an absolute disgrace for Canada. Once again, the Conservatives have proven that they are not governing in the interest of Canadians....The [Conservative] government is taking us back more than 20 years.... As a Canadian, I feel betrayed by this government, which is going to waste all the money that has been invested over the years in order to help police forces track these weapons.

Destroying the records proves that the issue of the cost of the system is a false pretext the Conservatives are using to justify destroying the registry. If they truly wanted to ensure that taxpayers get the best value for their money, they would forward the information to the Quebec government, to avoid destroying information that has already been paid for.

We are not stupid. Eliminating the long gun registry and its records has nothing to do with the cost of the system. This is an ideological decision, pure and simple. The Conservatives' attitude towards gun control is appalling.

• (1600)

They have no intention of coming up with a Canadian solution, a solution based on compromise. All that interests them is partisan games. Their policy is dividing Canadians and, unfortunately, they are using this issue as a funding tool to fill up their election war chest. They are doing this on the backs of Canadians, Quebecers and people who are likely to be victims of violence, such as women.

We have very serious reservations about Bill C-19 in the NDP. We believe that the problems relating to the registry must be addressed by strengthening the laws controlling the possession of firearms. We want to respond to the concerns of aboriginal and rural populations, while at the same time ensuring that our police forces have the tools they need to keep our communities safe. It must be

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said again, those on the front lines in the fight against crime, police officers, are calling for the firearms registry to be kept.

Police officers use the Canadian firearms registry more than 17,000 times each and every day. According to a survey, 74% of police officers who had used the registry stated that the search results were of benefit to their major operational activities. These statistics alone prove the usefulness of this registry.

The NDP is going to continue to rally Canadians in order to come up with solutions, rather than doing what the Conservatives do and playing political games that divide the population. The challenge that awaits us is to repair the damage caused by the parties that have used this issue as a political tool for their own partisan purposes. Canadians are counting on us to keep them safe. The firearms registry saves lives, and destroying it is yet another irresponsible action on the part of this government, a government that is not in sync with the public and arbitrarily plays with people's lives.

• (1605)

[*English*]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the member's speech. She suggests that we are using this as a political tool and dividing Canadians. What about the members of her caucus who actually did vote with us? They have suggested that they represent their constituents. How does she explain those people who did want to vote with us and that those who did ended up being penalized for that?

Also, does she not recognize what we have done for women with many aspects of our tough on crime legislation, how many of those pieces of legislation are put in place to help women affected by violence, particularly the trafficking bill where serious offenders are put in jail? That is our agenda. We wonder where they have been if they suggest this is the only bill that would protect women from violence. I would suggest that she do some homework.

[*Translation*]

Ms Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, with the omnibus Bill C-10, the Conservatives are trying to create criminals rather than help victims and rehabilitate criminals. If the member wants to know what the NDP is proposing, here are a couple of measures. We suggest that failing to register a gun be decriminalized for a first offence and that the person involved be fined instead. This is a proposal we put forward in 2010.

Moreover, we suggest that the law state that owners of long guns should not have to absorb the cost of registration. We also propose that disclosing information about the owners of firearms be prohibited, except for the purpose of protecting the public, or when ordered by a court or by law.

These are but a few recommendations. The NDP is looking for conciliatory solutions that help address the concerns of many Canadians across the country. I hope that my colleague is going to propose the same solutions.

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[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look to the member to provide some comment with respect to the Quebec government and other jurisdictions that have indicated that they want to gain access to the data bank. The Province of Quebec in particular, the province my colleague is from, is going to have to generate a significant amount of tax dollars to recreate a data bank if it wants to move ahead and establish its own registry.

I wonder if the member could provide comment or advice to the government from her perspective as to what she believes the Government of Canada should be doing to accommodate the Province of Quebec with respect to that data bank.

• (1610)

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, we have seen time and time again in this Parliament the Conservatives downloading costs onto the provinces and municipalities and refusing to help them with the bill.

That is why the NDP has proposed various changes to Bill C-19 at report stage. Notably, we have proposed abolishing clause 29, as we have heard police chiefs in provinces such as Quebec indicate their desire to retain data to help protect public safety.

The Conservative government has to stop downloading costs and has to help the provinces and municipalities foot the bills. We have seen this as well with the omnibus crime bill, Bill C-10. The government keeps putting forward laws and forcing the provinces as well as municipalities to pay for these enormous bills.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to add my support to Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act.

The proposed legislation is the product of extensive input by concerned Canadians, from academics and police officers to firearms enthusiasts to those concerned about establishing real, effective gun control. They have written letters, organized town hall meetings and, most importantly, voted for this Conservative government. I want to thank them all for sharing their thoughts and time, and for giving us a strong, stable national majority Conservative government.

For the benefit of those who may be new to the House, let me briefly recap the provisions of the bill.

I am pleased to say that the proposed legislation would eliminate the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. It would also destroy all data in the Canadian firearms registry and under the control of the chief firearms officers to preserve the privacy of Canadians. At the same time, it would retain the licensing system, which this government believes is the most effective form of gun control.

While this is not a complex piece of legislation, the bill has generated much discussion. I think it would be instructive to look at both sides of the argument. In their testimony, supporters of the long gun registry have dusted off several tired arguments about the long gun registry's benefits.

The first myth is that the long gun registry saves lives. There is no evidence that the long gun registry has stopped a single crime or saved a single life.

The second myth is that the long gun registry promotes responsible use of long guns. This will come as news to my constituents who have never registered their long guns, and to those who know the hundreds of years of experience prior to the introduction of the long gun registry. As far as I know, no one has ever become more responsible by filling out paperwork. The very suggestion is patronizing in the extreme.

The third myth is that the long gun registry is essential because it contains a comprehensive record of the number and type of guns in Canada, where they are located and who owns them. This is simply wishful thinking. In their testimony to the committee, police told us that the long gun registry was unreliable and inaccurate. As one detective from Saskatchewan said:

The registry does not indicate where firearms are stored or who may have control of the firearm, nor does it denote ownership. Tens of thousands of firearms are registered inaccurately.... Many firearms in the registry have multiple registrations—

This testimony should put to rest the idea that police officers can rely on the long gun registry to keep them safe. As the chief of the Abbotsford police put it:

—a flawed system is worse than any system.

The last myth is that pulling the plug on the long gun registry will unleash a flood of violence on our streets. This is preposterous for several reasons. First, the true heart of gun control in Canada is our licensing system, and the bill before us would keep that system intact. Anyone wanting to own or use any firearm must still pass a thorough background check, as well as a firearms safety course. Second, the RCMP would still maintain a registry of all restricted and prohibited firearms. This includes handguns and automatic weapons, which is what criminals tend to use.

I will now cite testimony by critics of the long gun registry. This will take some time because there are just so darn many of them. I will start with voices from the wilderness.

How do the sportsmen and women who enjoy heading into the woods for wild game hunting feel about the long gun registry? They are sick and tired of being treated as either potential criminals or irresponsible children.

• (1615)

In the same neck of the woods are the outfitters and tourist operators. These are the folks who make their living selling outdoor gear and hunting licences and who run lodges in remote areas. They sent a strong message that long guns were an important part of the rural and northern economy and that the long gun registry made it more difficult for them to make a living.

We must not forget those who need to hunt, aboriginal people, who use long guns to provide food for their families. Hunting is not an option for them; it is a necessity. Will we continue to make them criminals as well?

Government Orders

I have already mentioned that many in the policing community think the long gun registry is unreliable. Why do they feel this way? Because registering their long guns is not exactly a priority for criminals. I would say it ranks quite low on their to do list. In any case, police tell us criminals prefer to use handguns when committing homicides, not rifles or shotguns. Therefore, the long gun registry becomes moot.

A sergeant from Nova Scotia summed up these points in his testimony to the committee, when he said:

—the long-gun registry does not help police stop violence or make these communities safer from violence. And there's no evidence that it has ever saved a single life on its own merits.

There is one group that too often gets overlooked in the debate over the long gun registry. I am speaking about elite athletes who take part in shooting events at Commonwealth games, world cups, world championships and the Olympics. Whether it is the biathlon, or skeet or trap shooting, these athletes put in countless hours of training to hone their skills and performance so they can be the best and do this country proud.

How do we pay their sacrifice and hard work? With scorn. At the very moment, these high performance athletes are flashing their Canadian passports at our border. At the very moment when they could be basking in pride and representing our country in international competition, they are instead worried about being treated as common criminals.

Diana Carbrera, a former member of Canada's national shooting team, told us what she experienced each time when she went through Canadian customs. She said there was “a primal cringe every time I am asked for my papers, knowing what could be next and fearing what might happen”.

What could happen is delays, temporary detention, the confiscation of her gun, missed flights, missed competitions, the shame of having her hopes and dreams dashed, years of training down the drain and years of wondering what might have been. This is all because she has to show officials her long gun registration papers and they may, as she said, apply personal interpretations to our confusing law. Handing the paper over for inspection already makes the athlete feel like a criminal. It creates added anxiety and stress at the worst possible moment.

Is it not time we afford some respect to hundreds of farmers and those who use long guns to provide for their families? Is it not time we recognize that long guns have been, and remain, an important part of rural and the northern economy? I think it is high time we did because the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of disbanding the long gun registry. It does not keep front-line officers safer. It does not prevent crime. It makes criminals out of law-abiding citizens who are simply going about their business, whether it is shooting natural predators in a field, hunting for wild game, or hunting for a medal in decision competitions.

The long gun registry has been missing a target for many years. It is wasteful, ineffective and, as I illustrated, a thorn in the side of a variety of groups from all walks of life. It is time to adjust our sites to eliminate the long gun registry once and for all and focus on real gun control and real crime prevention.

Therefore, I urge all hon. members to join with me in supporting Bill C-19.

• (1620)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's speech and he might think me a bit of a heretic. I grew up in rural Nova Scotia. My grandfather was a gunsmith. My family owns a number of long guns and I enjoy skeet shooting on occasion myself. However, I think this registry should be saved.

I have deep concerns that when we have gun deaths in the future, that member will have to stand and justify why the Conservatives got rid of this registry, if anything could have been done to prevent future deaths.

Could the member give us a glimpse of how he would handle that issue in the future, if it unfortunately arises?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, I would submit that the hon. member is an exception rather than the rule. I have sat quite diligently on the public safety committee and listened to much testimony. I honestly believe what I say, that this registry is a complete and utter waste of money. We could have been using the money elsewhere.

There are licensing provisions in place which will not change. I do not think it matters one iota. In fact, I am confident it will not matter one iota.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the Conservative members on this vital and effective tool for keeping our streets safer and I fail to understand the logic.

They seem to believe that having less information about our demographics by not having a mandatory long form census is good for public policy-making in Canada.

They also believe in having less information about the ownership and whereabouts of deadly weapons, weapons that, yes, are used by peaceful Canadians for legal purposes, but they are also used to break the law and result in violence and death. How can having less information about the ownership and whereabouts of these deadly weapons actually make Canadians and our streets safer?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, it is not simply a question of less information, it is, quite frankly, a question of the duplication of information. This information is already contained in the licensing and firearms provisions.

I sat diligently through all the committee meetings and it was pointed out to us that the information in the firearms registry was very inaccurate. If it were to be useful, we could not rely on it. It is totally inaccurate.

The licensing provisions will be what we rely on as a government and we will not waste one more dollar in investment in this inaccurate and duplicated service.

Government Orders

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to elaborate a little for those who are watching. Often it is said that registering a long gun is no different from licensing a car, that it is really not that onerous to register a gun.

For the benefit of those who listen to the debate and hear the argument that there is no difference, could the member spell out the exact differences for the benefit of the public, please?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, there is quite a difference. When we obtain a car licence, for example, we are not assumed guilty while we get the licence.

This is the case with the long gun registry. It targets Canadians. It targets the wrong people as criminals. It targets law-abiding farmers, sports enthusiasts, sports people, Olympic athletes. It targets all these people. It is the wrong target. These are law-abiding citizens and they do not deserve to be treated as criminals.

• (1625)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in joining this debate on Bill C-19, it is with sadness that I hear the speeches of the Conservative members and the continuing campaign of misinformation and disinformation. The Conservatives are cynically pitting important members of our society, such as hunters, ranchers and farmers, against other important members of our society, our peace officers, trauma surgeons and those who care for victims of violence.

My remarks will be about the kind of governance and the kind of erosion of democracy and the unfortunate decision making of the government. Bill C-19 is a prime example of that.

We have an effective and vital tool that police chiefs, front-line officers, emergency room doctors, pediatricians, nurses, women's groups, the RCMP and many others insist saves lives, but the government will not listen. It will not be reasoned with. It refuses to allow the public good to deter it from its partisan campaign to kill this important tool.

I acknowledge that there could be ways to improve the registry. What major tool like this does not require continuous improvement? There are ways to incorporate the concerns of peaceful gun owners, and Liberals proposed just such changes.

This campaign is an ideological one on the part of the Conservative government and it is just an example of many others. The expansion of mandatory minimums and the elimination of the mandatory long form census are similar kinds of divisive, ideological campaigns. Why would the government, for example, want to throw more young people in jail and yet throw out an important tool for understanding the makeup of our country? It does not make sense, but it is the Prime Minister's style, which the Liberal leader recently coined as dictatorial federalism.

The government has not had any meaningful consultation with the provinces, with experts, with community organizations, with Canadians. It is simply bullying, baffling and bulldozing its way forward. That is a concern of anyone who cares about the health of our democracy in Canada.

The Conservatives openly proclaim that if someone or some party disagrees with them then that individual is an adversary, or a radical or a party that they will destroy. That is unworthy of Canada. It is frightening.

Among the people who have spoken to me in Vancouver Quadra about the direction the Conservative government and the Prime Minister are taking are people who have come from other countries to find refuge in Canada. They have come here because we have a reputation of being a responsible, peaceful, open democracy, a country where we value dissenting opinions, a country where we make better decisions and better laws because we listen to people and we change the plan to incorporate good ideas. It is discouraging for those new Canadians to see the direction that this country is going in, the closing down of debate, this dictatorial style, the exact types of governments from which they have fled.

The Conservative government believes that ideology and votes from specific segments of Conservative donors and partisans should be at the heart of government policies, not facts. The Conservative government is a government that has abdicated its responsibility to defend Canada's parliamentary democracy for the common good of all Canadians.

Permit me in contrast to provide some of the facts that have been so distorted in this misinformation campaign.

The gun registry does save lives. There can be no disputing that. Since the gun registry was implemented, there has been a substantial decline in the number of homicides, domestic violence incidents and suicides using rifles and shotguns. As I mentioned earlier in the debate, that same decline has not taken place with respect to handguns and other illegal weapons. Since 1995, there has been a decline of over 40%.

• (1630)

Law enforcement associations across Canada use the registry daily to help prevent, investigate and solve crimes. We know this registry provides safety. It improves the safety of first responders because they tell us so and the RCMP's own report made that clear. Because of the registry, we know that gun ownership is increasing in Canada. That is the kind of thing we learn and build into policing strategies. In fact, the number of firearms owned by each gun owner increased by an average of 12% between 2006 and 2010. That is useful information.

[*Translation*]

We know that registering firearms helps peace officers ensure the safety of our communities.

According to a report published on the RCMP website on January 23, police officers use the registry almost 14,000 times a day. In 2006, there were a total of 2,400,000 online requests. That figure more than doubled in 2010. These are not routine or useless verifications. Just 11 days ago, the firearms registry helped the Ontario Provincial Police apprehend a man in Sudbury for the dangerous use of a firearm after he had escaped from the police.

Government Orders

The registry also helps the police pursue criminals. The number of affidavits produced by the Canadian firearms program for the purposes of legal proceedings has continued to increase in recent years. More than 17,900 affidavits were produced by the CFP between 2003 and 2008 in support of legal proceedings involving firearms crimes.

The registry allows police officers to revoke permits if a gun owner starts committing drug-related offences, has mental health problems or spousal abuse issues, or does not store the gun safely. It allows police officers to focus preventing crimes before they are committed.

In closing, the RCMP report, an analysis based on facts and hidden by the Minister of Public Safety for months, found that “investing in firearms safety is very worthwhile”.

[*English*]

This is the opposite of what Conservative members are claiming. On top that, in terms of this dictatorial federalism, the government wants to destroy the registry's data. With a stroke of the pen, the government is seeking to eradicate, over the strong objections of the provinces, an invaluable set of information.

The provinces have helped pay for the data and they deserve to have a say in what happens. Again, ideology and not evidence is guiding the government's decision. In fact, by scraping the gun registry, the data becomes subject to the Library and Archives of Canada Act which dictates that records must be maintained for 10 years. After that, the government is free to do what it wants with it.

The government is ignoring the advice of Parliament's own officers. The Information Commissioner has said that destroying the data would violate the letter and spirit of the Library and Archives of Canada Act. The Privacy Commissioner has urged caution in destroying the data. This may well be subject to court cases put forward by the Province of Quebec.

However, the Conservative government does not seem to care. It does not want to consult, and that is dictatorial federalism. We know that the Province of Quebec is very interested in keeping this data and using it, but it is being ignored because it does not fit the government's ideology.

It is disturbing to see this kind of federal governance in Canada. No government has a mandate to ignore the facts and evidence, ignore expert advice, ignore the provinces and territories and dictate to Canadians.

I call upon the government to stop thumbing its nose at Canadians and let facts, not ideology, become the cornerstone of its public safety policies.

• (1635)

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they have been pretty consistent about grabbing figures out of the air and trying to make them into something. The member talked about a 40% decrease in overall violent crime in Canada. She would probably need to explain the 45% decrease in violent crime in the United States since it did not have a gun registry. There is no evidence at all to the notion that it is directly linked.

I would like the member to explain how she can tie the data she has directly to the registry and how, if somebody used a registered firearm, we would be able to prevent that crime.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is part of a party that is not taking action on other kinds of issues where there is scientific evidence of the problem, such as climate change.

What do the climate change deniers want to do? They want proof that this increase in temperatures is worldwide, proof that 10 out of the last 12 hottest years on record have just occurred. At some point, we need to take action based on evidence without being able to directly tie one act to another.

We need only think about tobacco usage. How many years did the tobacco industry argue that there was no evidence that tobacco kills? We know that tobacco kills.

These arguments, in the meantime, are designed to frustrate action and to maintain an ideological position.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I speak with police officers in Timmins and in the Iroquois Falls region and ask them how they use the registry, they say that when they go out on a domestic violence call, they need to know if there are four or five guns in the house. They say that knowing there is a gun owner is not sufficient because that fifth gun could be the difference between life and death. That is what we hear from front-line police officers.

The security chief over there from Yorkton—Melville sent a letter to me saying that he believed that the Chiefs of Police of Canada were attempting to find all the data on gun owners so they could seize their weapons. He said that he felt that the police were leading us to a totalitarian state. I think that kind of language from a government member is very disturbing.

Why does my hon. colleague think the government is so convenient about using police when it suits its needs but when the police speak about their actual use, they are decried as a totalitarian threat to the liberties of the Conservative backbench.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, there is an example in which members of the RCMP recently found out that they had mistakenly permitted a Walther G22 rifle and an AP-80, which is in the same family as an AK-47, but, because of the registry, they were able to find out that this dangerous and restricted firearm had been inaccurately registered and corrected the mistake.

It is a good question. I can only say that this is one of the sad aspects of the situation, this hypocrisy where the Conservatives will go to any lengths because they determined that there would be some votes on this issue. Never mind that it pits people from some parts of the country against people in other parts of the country and, in fact, reduces the amount of information we have, which can never be a good thing.

Government Orders

•(1640)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by thanking the many individuals who have been part of the development of this historic bill, specifically the member for Yorkton—Melville for his advocacy over many years, as well as the member for Portage—Lisgar for her private member's bill in the previous Parliament. I also thank members of our Conservative police caucus for the great input they provided.

I rise in support of Bill C-19, ending the long-gun registry act, and I do so in full awareness that people living in rural Canada, including those in my constituency, are paying particular attention to all debates surrounding the repeal of the long gun registry. They know that our government was elected with a mandate to eliminate the long gun registry, that the Speech from the Throne repeated that pledge and that when we make promises, we carry through on them. They also know that this government, by introducing this bill so early in our mandate, is determined to represent their best interests. What they do not know as they listen to this is whether, once again, fear and innuendo will trump common sense. They do not know whether all hon. members will finally understand and respect the tradition of rural Canada and whether they will still be considered criminals in the eyes of the Liberal elite.

The debate about the long gun registry does not simply reflect differences between rural and urban regions. Indeed, there is clear evidence that more and more urban Canadians are recognizing that the long gun registry is wasteful and ineffective. I want to speak to the changing attitudes in urban centres toward the long gun registry, but first I will reflect on the very real differences in attitudes toward guns and safety in rural Canada because, despite those differences, I believe that all Canadians, wherever they live, want the same thing and that if we can just understand each other a little better, we can achieve our goals of creating safer communities.

As members may know, I spent my entire life in a rural community, the kind of place where people did not need to lock their doors at night. As a matter of fact, when I was growing up I did not even know where the key was to the house. When people were out at night, they were looking at a bevy of lights, which were stars, not like in the city where people only see the lights of buildings.

I like to think back to my ancestors and the pioneers where guns were part of their reality. A good example was my father-in-law, Cecil Moore, who was born in Charlottetown in 1901 and whose family, in 1903, settled in, what was at that time the Northwest Territories, the beautiful Pine Lake area in central Alberta. Coincidentally, it was the same year that my family settled in that same region.

Growing up in this frontier, he learned how to hunt and trap, as did his brothers and sisters, as did my father and his siblings. As a young man, Cecil would buy furs from people like my father for the Hudson's Bay company to be sold at the Edmonton fur auction. His stories of hunting, whether out of necessity or sport, coupled with his adventures on trap lines, showed the character of those who lived off the land in harmony with nature. It is these stories that were part of richness of the pioneer life in western Canada. This is why we teach our children how to handle firearms. It is a tradition that is passed

down from generation to generation, one that my wife, Judy, and I have been proud to pass down to our children.

However, traditions are more than just tales around a campfire. It is how we as farmers handle gopher infestations to protect crops, pastures and livestock; it is how ranchers protect baby calves in the spring from hunger coyotes, wolves and cougars; and it is how hunters help manage wildlife numbers in the fall as they track and harvest game for their winter freezers. This is why it is so disheartening when those who mean well but are so misinformed minimize that which we hold so dear.

There were certainly rifles and shotguns in my childhood home. I learned how to use them, how to care for them and I was taught to respect them. From my experiences, I know that firearms are not to be trifled with and yet neither are they to be feared. They are simply tools of the trade for country living. We do not tell farmers to register their tractors, we do not tell carpenters to register their saws and yet we compel people in the country to register their long guns.

If the gun registry actually prevented urban crime or kept police officers safer, people living in rural Canada might reconsider their objections. However, there is no evidence that it has stopped a single crime or saved a single life. It is time for the long gun registry to be put out to pasture. That is not just the view of people like me. It is a view increasingly shared by people living in cities as well.

•(1645)

In 2010 Angus Reid discovered that even in provinces with large urban populations, many of the individuals polled believed the long gun registry had not prevented crime and should be shut down. In the province of Quebec only 22% believed it has helped prevent crime. In Ontario they found that only 16% thought it helped prevent crime. This is a tremendous shift in opinion and it shows the depth of frustration with the waste and ineffectiveness of the long gun registry.

Canadians want gun control systems that truly keep their streets and neighbourhoods safer, that combat the criminal use of firearms, and that use common sense to achieve these objectives. I am proud to say that is exactly what Bill C-19 would help to achieve.

The proposed legislation would remove the requirement to register non-restricted firearms. That means farmers, hunters and other residents of rural Canada would no longer have to register their shotguns and rifles. This is a pledge we made and we are honoured to uphold it. At the same time, we are not about to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Some provisions in the law make sense and we have kept them in place. These include the need for all owners of non-restricted firearms to obtain a licence. To obtain a licence, all Canadians would still need to pass a firearms safety course and a background check.

Government Orders

This bill is about ensuring effective gun control. In that sense, Bill C-19 builds on a host of initiatives introduced by this government over the past five years, measures which enhance compliance while cutting red tape for lawful owners of firearms. These measures include a \$7 million annual investment to strengthen front-end screening of first-time applicants for firearms licences. It is also true that we are determined to keep firearms away from people who should not have them.

I urge all hon. members to consider the facts before us. With Bill C-19 we can replace a wasteful and ineffective gun registry with common-sense measures that will yield results. We can end years of pointless discrimination against rural Canadians. We can respect the shift in opinion which shows that even many urban Canadians now want to scrap the gun registry.

There is no denying that guns are viewed differently depending on the context. If I see a farmer with a rifle or a shotgun, I do not give it a second thought because I know that gun is a tool that will be used properly. There is no doubt that Canadians, whether urban or rural, essentially want the same thing. They want their children to grow up in communities free of gun violence. They want firearms kept out of the hands of the unqualified and the dangerous. If guns do fall into the wrong hands, Canadians want those offenders punished. These are the values at the heart of Bill C-19, values that are shared by Canadians from all regions of the country.

I also believe that Canadians recognize the need for fairness, balance and common sense. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear that the long gun registry has penalized rural Canadians and for no good reason. We cannot undo what has been done but we can seize this opportunity now to do the right thing.

I urge all hon. members to join me in supporting Bill C-19, an approach to firearms that is much needed and long overdue.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know we are in the heat of the moment of this debate, but I have no doubt that history will show that this was a disastrous moment for Canadian politics and safety by doing away with the long gun registry. I heard one of the Conservatives say that he thought this bill and dismantling the whole system and all of the documentation would not make any difference. I find that to be really astounding. I agree with the member for Vancouver Quadra who said it is always better to have more information on something that is such a critical issue as people's safety.

I want to ask the member what he thinks about the Conservatives' policy of dividing Canadians. There are huge numbers of Canadians, police forces and individual police officers who use that registry and who see it as a very important public safety tool. I want to ask him what he thinks about the Conservatives' tactic of dividing people on this issue, which is something that we urge the government not to do.

• (1650)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, one of the things the member spoke of was information.

I have had the privilege of serving on the public accounts committee for the last two years. We have worked closely with the Office of the Auditor General and with the former auditor general, Sheila Fraser, on many different files. I think back to when the

former auditor general spoke initially about her study on the long gun registry. She spoke not only of the waste that was associated with it, but also of the flawed information.

When we hear that about 90% of the information that was contained in the registry is flawed, and others suggest that the government should supply that information to some other areas, we must think what the consequences would be of providing flawed information. We would find there would be a lot more concern. Therefore, it is important that all of this data be eliminated.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member for Red Deer. I thought we would hear a speech without the misinformation and disinformation that I have been concerned about, but unfortunately it was more of the same.

In order to highlight that, in 2003 there were 792 deaths in Canada involving a firearm, many of which were long guns. Of the last 18 officers killed in the line of duty as of 2010, 14 were killed by long guns.

Could the member share with the House how many mortalities and homicides in Canada are due to the use of carpenter's saws?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question, but not some of the comments she made with regard to it.

As passionate as people are about those people who have been killed by long guns, I have that same passion. I also know people, friends of mine, who have been killed by long guns. The long gun registry in no way would have helped or protected them under those circumstances. There is not just passion on one side of this issue or from one political party.

We understand what has to happen is there has to be something in our criminal justice system to protect individuals, and that is going to come through intelligent gun control measures, looking at those who are bound to commit crime, and then dealing with those situations. We need to look at ways that are going to protect our communities.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time I have risen in the House to ask the Conservative members and the members of the opposition to keep the firearms registry. Conservative and opposition members, there is still time to preserve this very important tool that saves thousands of lives. We have had a great deal of debate about Bill C-19 since it was introduced in the House on October 25, 2011.

My NDP colleagues and I have proposed a number of amendments in order to preserve and improve the registry and all the data that has been accumulated over the years, most of which has been paid for by Canadians. I hope that the Conservatives will heed our call and that of the people of Canada.

Government Orders

In a democracy like ours, citizens have rights and responsibilities. A constitutional state such as Canada must constantly juggle the well-being of society as a whole and the rights of individuals. It is possible to find a balance between the two.

One of the primary responsibilities of a democratic state is to ensure its population's safety. That is why we have laws governing the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, and laws governing driving. It is important for individuals to maintain their personal freedom, their freedom to choose, but the state must also ensure the safety of all its citizens.

As far as I know, no one questions the importance of having a driver's licence. The fact that an individual has to show that he can drive a vehicle without endangering the safety of others does not take away his right to drive but simply governs it. An individual who takes a test to get a driver's licence is not necessarily a dangerous driver nor is he considered as such. It is the same thing for those who own firearms. Individuals who own firearms are not potential criminals. The fact that they have to request a permit and register their firearm does not make them dangerous. In this case, the purpose of the law is to prevent individuals who are dangerous to society from owning a weapon that could be used to take the life of another individual. This seems simple and logical to me.

The state has the duty to protect its most vulnerable populations, including children, women and men who are victims of domestic violence. Remember that one in three women who died at the hands of their husbands were shot. Since the firearms registry was introduced, the rate of spousal homicide has decreased by 50%.

Nathalie Provost, who was a student at École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989, also believes that the government should put certain parameters on individual liberty for people who own a weapon. She was seriously injured in the tragedy and still carries the scars that can result from such weapons.

Hayder Kadhim, who survived the shooting on September 13, 2006, at Dawson College in Montreal, also advocates for a registry. Every day, he lives with the painful memory of his friend Anastasia DeSousa dying that day. The École Polytechnique, Concordia and Dawson College massacres should serve to remind us of the importance of keeping all Canadians safe. We seem to have short memories.

Protecting the public also means caring about young people in distress who are contemplating suicide. Rifles and shotguns are often used by people trying to commit suicide. Ironically, this week is the 22nd edition of Suicide Prevention Week in Quebec. I would like to commend the crucial work being done by mental health professionals and street outreach workers who, day in and day out, pour their hearts and souls into supporting people in distress and people struggling with dark thoughts. We must stand together, and suicide is not an option.

Despite all that, unfortunately, prevention does not appear to be part of the Conservatives' public safety strategy or a priority for them. Instead of spending billions of dollars to build new prisons and passing on costs to the provinces, it could reform some of these tools that are vital to preventing violence and listen to the experts.

Consider the facts. Police officers consult the firearms registry over 17,000 times a day. The Institut national de santé publique du Québec estimates that over 2,000 lives have been saved since the registry was implemented. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police considers it essential.

• (1655)

Just today, we contacted the Sûreté du Québec in my riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry, which is located on the U.S. border and has problems with the smuggling of firearms and cigarettes. The Sûreté du Québec believes the registry is a necessary, indispensable and effective tool. It is one of a number of sources of information that allow the police to have a more complete file on suspects before taking action.

The RCMP, Sûreté du Québec and Canada Border Services Agency regularly use the registry. According to a survey, 92% of police officers use the Canadian firearms information system and, of these, 74% stated that the query results helped with their major operational activities.

Police can access the registry from their vehicles and can use the information in their initial risk assessment. The registry also helps to break up crime networks involved in arms smuggling. The centralized and computerized registration system allows police officers to quickly track a gun and obtain the file on the owner.

Consequently, some provinces, such as Quebec, have reiterated that they want to create their own registry and have asked Ottawa to not destroy the data. The Conservatives are completely ignoring the security needs of the provinces, just as they ignored the provinces' requests in terms of health, retirement and the environment. When will this government finally sit down with the provinces, the stakeholders and the experts to improve the registry? Why is this government turning a deaf ear, when it claims that law and order are its priorities for society? It makes absolutely no sense and is inconsistent.

It is true that improvements must be made to the gun control system. However, the NDP has been suggesting various improvements and changes since 2010. The following are a few of the ideas contributed by the official opposition. First, we must ensure that everyone who buys a long gun has a permit. This is currently not the case with this bill. For that reason, we propose to amend clause 11 of Bill C-19. Unfortunately, the Conservatives have rejected all our amendments from the outset. With this bill, it will not be mandatory to verify whether the buyer of a long gun has a permit. That is not right.

We must also require businesses to keep an inventory of firearms. This bill makes no mention of that. We must also simplify the registration process and the paperwork, and reduce the cost of registration. Everyone agrees on that. We have to ensure that the data are used properly and that citizens' privacy is respected. We must also take into account the ancestral rights of aboriginals. We must ensure that semi-automatic weapons are classified as dangerous and prohibited weapons.

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This is a constructive approach. We must sit down for discussions, and continue to consult experts and the provinces and territories, but this Conservative government still refuses to do so for the sake of ideology, for the sake of satisfying the needs of a minority.

The Conservatives are willing to jeopardize public safety just to please that minority. Their words are inconsistent. On one hand, they want to increase the number of prisons and transfer the cost of prisons to the provinces in the name of enhancing public safety, and, on the other hand, they want to take away a necessary tool that police officers are calling for, also in the name of public safety. They want to have it both ways. It is hard to make any sense of it.

I call on the government to be open and willing to compromise for once, and to make smart reforms to the Canadian firearms registry, or Bill C-19, which is not ready to be voted on in its current form since so many things still need to be improved. We still have time if the Conservatives are willing.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member with some frustration, quite honestly.

We already know the long gun registry cost \$2 billion and has not saved a life. We already know that it is flawed. The Auditor General has indicated that. We know that criminals do not register their weapons.

The member said we should talk to some of the professional people. We have eight or nine law enforcement officers in our Conservative caucus. Not one of them says we should not be getting rid of the registry.

Let me give a scenario. An individual has a registered gun. A criminal breaks into the individual's house, steals the weapon and uses it for criminal activity. The gun is found. To whom do the police come? The person to whom it is registered. That person now has to defend himself or herself about where the gun came from.

What kind of solution do you see by keeping the registry to solve that problem?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would remind all hon. members to address their comments to the chair rather than to their colleagues. I do not have an answer to those questions.

The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I can understand that the debate brings out very passionate opinions. I have two things to say. First, I find it laughable that the Conservatives are always talking about costs. How much does a life cost? Is it not worth investing in a tool that is used by police for prevention and to save lives? A study by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec estimates that over 2,100 lives have been saved as a result of the registry. That is what I have to say about costs. I think that everyone agrees that life is priceless. We must therefore take action.

In the second part of the question, the member said that the registry is useless, but on the contrary, it is useful. When someone commits a crime using a firearm, the information in the registry may lead police to the owner of that firearm. That is the starting point for an investigation. This is useful information.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there may be eight or nine police officers as part of one's caucus, but that is not the message that has been sent to Parliament Hill regarding the chief of police and many other emergency responders. We can look at some of their fact-and-fiction websites that try to clear up some of the myths about the gun registry.

The registry might have had some difficult times at the beginning. However, the vast majority of police officers who have communicated with me have indicated that it is one of the tools that assists them, much like a taser can be effective as one of those tools. From what I understand, the administrative costs are now less than \$4 million annually. I think that we have to have a bit of a reality check in terms of what the actual costs are.

My question for the member is something that I have asked one of her colleagues. The Province of Quebec has asked for a gun registry and is prepared to re-establish a gun registry. If Quebec did not have the financial resources to establish its own gun registry, would it be better for it to use the resources on more community police officers in the city of Montreal and things of that nature if there was a national government here in Ottawa prepared—

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Liberal colleague. Indeed, the National Assembly unanimously decided to request the transfer of the data in the firearms registry. People have already paid for the registry and it is useful to many police officers. In concrete terms, the SQ in my riding reiterated today that the registry is very useful and even necessary in order to dismantle illegal weapons rings. Many police officers use it as one of a number of tools. This has been called for by many people in Quebec, including elected officials and police officers. Members must demonstrate goodwill and open-mindedness in order to discuss this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise for the first time in 2012 to contribute, hopefully for the last time, to this debate concerning the non-merits of the long gun registry.

I come from Alberta. Albertans have a particular wisdom, I would suggest, when it comes to the virtue both of long guns and their need with respect to industry. My friend, the member for Red Deer, gave a great speech regarding his experience growing up in rural Alberta. My experience is somewhat different, but I certainly share those sentiments.

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When I was home for the Christmas break, a number of my constituents and other individuals I met were quite adamant that the time for the long gun registry had long passed and it was time that we got on with the work of having it finally abolished because of its lack of usefulness and merit.

I would suggest to members of this House that the long gun registry, from its inception, represents all that is wrong with the modern nanny state. The long gun registry, although conceived out of a very tragic incident in Montreal, was ill-conceived from the beginning. It was premised on government's and legislators' overestimation of their ability to solve any wrongs in society. It was premised that through legislation and through this—

• (1710)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. If I could tell the hon. member, his earpiece is beside the microphone and it is causing a lot of feedback.

The hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I apologize, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize to members of the House.

The registry represents legislators' and governments' overestimation of their ability to solve and prevent human frailties. There are some things that governments cannot do. Tragedies, such as the one at École Polytechnique, or the one a decade later at Dawson College, are those types of events that no amount of registration, law or legislative registry would necessarily prevent.

The long gun registry was founded on an incorrect premise. The premise is quite simple, and we have heard about it today from members on this side of the House: criminals would register their guns. We know that that is a faulty premise. They would not. These are individuals who are involved in gun violence and tragic circumstances, who flaunt society's norms. They flaunt society's values, and they certainly flaunt society's laws. They are not the type to register their firearms.

Licensing is of course quite different from registration. Nothing in Bill C-19, or its predecessor legislation, the private member's bill in the last Parliament that was sponsored by the member for Portage—Lisgar and almost passed, would affect the licensing mechanism. Licensing is important because it deals with the individual. It is the individual who is going to have ownership of that firearm, or the ammunition to use the firearm. That person is going to have to satisfy the authorities that he or she is competent and has taken the requisite firearms safety course. Criminal record checks are done. If they come back negative, then the individual is entitled to a licence. The licensing mechanism has value. The registration mechanism has no value.

I have heard members on the other side of the House frequently say we register vehicles and our dogs, but we are not going to register our firearms. What they ignore is a clear line of constitutional demarcation between the federal government's responsibility and the responsibility of the provinces with respect to property and civil rights. As we know, property and civil rights were specifically given to the provinces under the British North America Act and now the Constitution Act. Dog and cat licensing has been further delegated to the municipalities. The federal government can

only have a registry if there is some valid criminal purpose. We do have registries. We have a sex offender registry. We have a DNA databank. These are registries that have a valid criminal purpose.

I submit to all members of the House that valid criminal purpose is absent in the long gun registry. There is no criminal purpose. Therefore, if a registry of long guns were to be maintained it would have to be maintained by the provinces under their provincial jurisdiction, under section 92 of British North American Act.

As some members know, I sit on the public safety committee. I sat on it in the last Parliament. We heard evidence from both sides of this debate. There are people who truly believe that this registry has merit. We heard from groups, police officers and experts on both sides of this debate. I submit that there is no evidence that this registry has ever prevented a single crime or that it has ever saved a single life. In fact, the evidence is quite the opposite. Proponents of the long gun registry sometimes cite the Mayerthorpe tragedy to somehow support their contention that the long gun registry has merit. I find that perplexing. On that day in March 2005, four members of the RCMP tragically died at the hands of James Roszko, a madman who flaunted all of society's laws. Tragically, he murdered four brave Mounties before taking his own life.

Proponents of the long gun registry cite the fact that there were two accomplices who were subsequently convicted of aiding and abetting that offence, admittedly through registration. They see that somehow as a success. It is not. It is a failure. Four Mounties died.

• (1715)

Police officers cannot and do not rely on the long gun registry in their every day service. We heard of a situation in, I think, 2006 in Laval, Quebec, where a police officer responding to a domestic incident did a long gun registry search, which came back negative. As a result she did not call for backup and went in to deal with the disturbance and was shot. It was to her own peril that the police officer relied on the defective and inaccurate information in the registry.

There is no evidence that a single life has been saved or a single crime stopped by this ill-conceived concept brought in by a previous government.

I live in the city of Edmonton, which held the sad and tragic distinction last year of having 47 murders, the most in Canada. However, not a single one was committed with a long gun. The weapon of choice in Edmonton is the knife, and more victims were stabbed than by any other mode of homicide. In my city there is no correlation between violent crime and long guns.

The last day before our Christmas break there was a tragic incident in southern Alberta, a triple homicide followed by a suicide at Claresholm near the city of Lethbridge. A fourth individual was seriously injured. There were three murders, one attempted murder and a suicide. We found out that the weapons used in that incident were registered.

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When murders occur, whether or not the guns involved are registered, society and legislatures and this type of registration mechanism are ill-equipped and cannot prevent these types of tragedies. Individuals use registered weapons to cause tragic incidents. In a city like Edmonton, knives and hand guns are the predominant weapon for homicides.

Therefore, the registry does not prevent crime. Those who believe otherwise are well-intentioned but their feelings and their theories are not borne out by the evidence. It is time that we put this registration mechanism to bed and reallocate the resources toward real law enforcement and to real purpose and activities that can prevent crime.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my outrage at my colleague's comments. The reason the registry is not reliable is that this government deliberately neglected it. Amnesty after amnesty, criticism after criticism—it is no wonder the registry is full of holes.

Here is a useful analogy: if I repeatedly neglected to pay my electricity bill and my phone bill month after month, I would be in the dark, I would be cold, and I would have no way to contact my electricity company to ask them to turn the power back on. That is obvious.

Now that they have deliberately created a crisis, how can my colleagues opposite continue to support a bill to dismantle the registry that they spent the last six years undermining?

I cannot believe it. How can my colleague continue to support that position?

• (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the premise of the member's intervention.

It is not because of an amnesty that the long gun registry is ineffective, but because the registry was based on a false premise. The premise was that criminals and those predisposed to gun crime would register their weapons. They do not and therefore the data in the data bank are faulty and unreliable.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested in my colleague's constitutional analysis and his analysis of the division of powers.

In particular he stated that the purpose of the registry seemed to conflict with the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces in that it infringed on property rights, which would imply that somehow the long gun registry was non-constitutional in that it offended the Constitution Act.

I would be quite interested to hear him explain the legal challenges that have been made to the validity of the Constitution Act. Certainly there is well-financed lobby.

If this is in fact within the exclusive constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces, why is this legislation going so far as to interfere with the admittedly legitimate exercise of power of the provinces when

we hear from provinces that they want to maintain the records to enact their own?

I find it a little troubling that we hear this is a matter of provincial jurisdiction, yet an element of the legislation infringes upon that jurisdiction.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the constitutional jurisdiction, as the hon. member no doubt will be aware, there was a constitutional challenge led largely by my home province, the Province of Alberta, arguing as I have that the registry was in fact *ultra vires* because of a division of powers. That argument was not successful, because the courts ruled that it attempted to have a valid criminal purpose. "Attempted to" are the key words.

I think the evidence is borne out, if members listened to my and previous speakers' interventions, that it does not prevent crime and does not save lives. Therefore, the fact that it was an attempt at a valid criminal purpose does not make for a valid criminal result. For that reason, this registry has to be put to bed.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the possession and acquisition licensing program, I understand that firearms will still require a licence. I wonder what the member feels about how that system works to protect the public.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my comments, I support the licensing mechanism because it deals with the individual.

The registry deals with the gun, the property. There is no correlation between safety and crime prevention and the gun. There is safety and crime prevention with respect to the person who uses the gun. To get a valid licence, people must pass criminal records checks and must have taken a firearms safety course and demonstrated they are capable of using that firearm safely.

I support the licensing mechanisms, which are unaltered by Bill C-19.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I cannot say I take any pleasure in rising to speak at report stage on Bill C-19, because I believe this bill represents the triumph of ideology and wedge politics over evidence and public safety.

Over the last 30 years, Canada has introduced numerous measures to tighten firearms control and has produced a system that has served us well, the twin system of licensing owners and registration of weapons. Why did we come to this system?

There are three main reasons that we have slowly but surely tightened our control over firearms in this country. Certainly there were spectacular tragedies, like those at École Polytechnique in Montreal, which caused us to pay the due attention we should have paid much earlier to this crisis. My colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry talked in very personal terms about some of the suffering that was caused to students and their families in Montreal. Those victims and families worked very hard to get the government to set up this gun registry to try to prevent situations like this one in the future.

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There were two other factors that were also at play. One of those was the very frequent use of firearms in domestic violence, which I will come back to in a second. The other was the very frequent use of firearms in suicides, particularly youth suicides. What is significant about firearms and suicides is that firearms are final. If people take pills and then change their mind, they can call an ambulance. If someone slashes his or her wrists, there is a chance. When a firearm is used to commit suicide, it is over.

These three things together cause us as a society to say we can and must do better in the control of firearms.

What evidence do we have of the effectiveness of this registry? In the short time I have, I want to talk about three pieces of very important evidence. The other side likes to say there is no evidence, and I will come back to talk about what I think they are doing in misusing information.

My first piece of evidence is the very strong support of police for the gun registry. We all know that long guns have killed about 80% of the officers killed on duty in this country. However, I do not think that fact is what has caused police organizations to support the bill. We also know they access the system about 14,000 times a day. The other side tries to discredit that by saying it is automatic and that it does not provide good information. From my personal experience as a police board member, I know police do not do things that waste their time; they are too busy. So if they are accessing the registry there is a good reason to do so. Police believe it to be a very useful tool. This was found in the RCMP evaluation of the Canadian firearms program in February 2010.

Also, almost without exception, police leaders and police associations support the gun registry, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Police Boards. I sit on the public safety committee where I am the vice-chair. What the government tried to do on that committee was to find individual police officers and individual researchers who would say they did not support the registry, when the overwhelming evidence was that police organizations, police leaders and those who work in the field of criminal justice find it to be effective.

The second piece of evidence we have comes from domestic violence. One in three women in this country killed by their husbands is shot, and 88% of them are shot with legally owned registered rifles and shotguns. Over the past five years, courts have ordered the revocation of 9,950 permits to own firearms. This has allowed police to go to those residences and pick up the firearms. While the other side said there was no evidence of the registry preventing deaths, I believe there are strong indications that many deaths were prevented by the seizure of arms from the 9,950 people the courts had determined were unstable and therefore should not have firearms in their possession. If this bill passes, the police will no longer be able to go with confidence to residences and pick up all the firearms there, only those the people wish to tell the police officer about.

As for the results, there are good statistics in this area. Gun-related spousal homicides are down 50% since the introduction of the registry. This is an undeniable fact. The use of long guns in suicide has also decreased by 69% since the introduction of the registry, with

no evidence of a substitution of other methods. As I mentioned, the problem with guns and suicide is the finality of it. The Institut national de santé public du Québec estimates that 2,100 lives have been saved since the implementation of the registry. An excellent example of sophistry is the claim that we cannot prove a connection between those two. However, we can prove a correlation between the two and we must rely on these kinds of correlations.

● (1725)

Sure there have been concerns about the registry. There was definitely mismanagement of its implementation by the Liberals, long delays and huge cost overruns. When the Conservatives on the other side cite their cost figures, that is like water under the bridge. This is money that was, yes, wasted by the Liberal government, but it has already been spent and cannot be recovered.

There have been some other concerns about rural residents and first nations, and I certainly heard from them in my riding, especially about the criminalization of a first offence for failure to register a firearm. On this side of the House, we argued that could easily be fixed, and we suggested amendments to do that.

There have been concerns about the accuracy of a firearms registry. Again, on the other side, the members like to select their evidence and choose an earlier time before most of those problems with data entry were corrected. We have had more recent reports showing that most of the data which is entered is very correct. There is a very small 1% to 2% error rate. There are holes in the registry, as my hon. friend from Beauport—Limouilou said, because of the amnesties that had been granted, which created some doubt among Canadians about whether they were required to comply with this legislation. Most recent, that amnesty has been extended to 2013.

In 2010 the NDP introduced amendments to address those kinds of concerns. Four of those were put forward on this side of the House.

The first of those was decriminalizing the first-time failure to register. This would make a one-time failure to register a non-criminal ticket. However, a persistent refusal to register firearms would have remained a criminal offence. That is a good compromise, and in talking with people in my riding, they felt that would have solved their problem.

Second, the NDP suggested amendments in 2010 that would have placed a permanent ban in legislation on having a charge for registration. Therefore, we would take away a fee. I heard from first nations in my riding that the registration fees were a barrier for those who were involved in subsistence hunting. Taking away that fee, as we proposed in 2010, would have solved that problem.

A third problem was there were, apparently, releases of private information for the registry. We proposed amending the legislation so information could only be released for use in law enforcement or in court cases.

Finally, we proposed an amendment which said that we would add a legal guarantee of aboriginal treaty rights to the gun registry.

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Instead of taking those compromises and trying to work with the opposition, the government proceeded with the complete abolition of the gun registry and added on, in this new version, the destruction of the data.

As the Conservatives have a majority in the House and are determined to proceed, we have been forced, at report stage, to suggest amendments to fix the worst parts of the bill as it stands. I see five things that need to be changed before the bill proceeds.

First, the bill fails to require owners to check for a valid licence before transferring a firearm. The other side likes to talk about criminals not registering their guns, but the bill, as it stands, would open a major door for criminals acquiring firearms because the seller of firearms would not have to check for a valid licence before transferring that weapon. Therefore, even if the government were right and the registry was not much of a deterrent to prevent criminals getting guns, now it would throw the doors wide open for criminals to purchase guns.

The second thing that needs to be fixed is this. Before the institution of the registry, businesses were required to keep records of the sale of non-restricted firearms. There is nothing in the bill that puts that requirement back. Yes, many responsible businesses will keep records, but many which might not be so responsible will not keep those records.

The third thing that needs to be fixed is we would no longer be tracking the loss, theft or destruction of non-prohibited and non-restricted weapons.

The fourth is that destroying the data would mean that there are some court cases in progress and some future court cases which might come forward where convictions could be obtained if they had data from the gun registry. That data would be destroyed and those people would walk free.

Finally, the bill would treat all non-prohibited, non-restricted weapons the same, meaning the Ruger Mini-14, which was used in Montreal in 1989 and in the Norway shootings, would now become an unregulated weapon in our country.

I believe the real agenda here is delivery by the government on a wedge issue promise, one which delivered great fundraising to the Conservatives and had a great deal of success in dividing the country. However, the arguments on the other side really depend on the selective use of information. I know the government likes to say that the police caucus on its side does not support the gun registry. It would surprise if opponents of the gun registry or police had run for another party. The government self-selected that caucus because of its opposition.

• (1730)

As I said earlier, we have seen arguments with select witnesses, select evidence and select research to support a hard-line position, which the government had already decided on before it came to debate in the House. Therefore, we are back to where we started, and that is the triumph of ideology and divisive politics over evidence and good public policy to keep Canadians safe.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is the member's knowledge of rifles is? Has he ever

shot a rifle? Has he ever belonged to a gun club? Has he ever owned a rifle? Does he have a family member who has one? Has he ever gone hunting? Has he gone to a first nations community where residents rely on hunting for sustenance? What kind of involvement does he have with weapons?

I would be interested to know because it seems to me that often people who have a personal interest in this, especially relating to hunting and fishing activities and having to rely on them for sustenance, have a more accurate depiction of what actually takes place with the gun registry and the realities of it.

• (1735)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I genuinely thank the member for his questions because the answer to all of them, except belonging to a gun club, is yes. My father and grandfather were hunters. I went pheasant and duck hunting with them when I was young. I have never belonged to a gun club. I have fired a rifle. I have gone hunting with my first nations friends. Again, I think that was an attempt to be a bit selective.

What I also rely on is my experience of 20 years working in the academic criminal justice system and the real research that has been done on the gun registry, my personal experience as a member of a police board and a member of a municipal council with the police force, which strongly supports the gun registry.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is from the neighbouring riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, nearly as beautiful as Saanich—Gulf Islands.

I do not know if he saw today's *Victoria Times Colonist*. Further evidence of the support for our local police forces in southern Vancouver Island is from a story today in the *Times Colonist* about the quick action, led by police Sergeant Dean Jantzen in Saanich, leading to an arrest based on the theft of many long guns. Sergeant Jantzen stated, "Access to the long-gun registry has been critical to advancing the speed of this investigation".

I draw that to his attention and ask for further comments.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I will not start a debate with the hon. member from the neighbouring riding about whose riding is more beautiful because that will take all of our time. What she has to say certainly confirms my experience, as I said, as a police board member and then as a city councillor, where I very often heard from police forces that they used the gun registry for very good effect.

The other side also tends to neglect its use in solving crimes and getting convictions. That is the story the member is talking about today, that it helped police conduct an investigation, it will help get a conviction in court and it is an important tool for future crime prevention and, as the other side likes to say, keep criminals off the streets.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in response to our colleague from Alberta, I would say that we have talked a great deal about long guns for hunting. Unfortunately, long guns also include semi-automatic weapons with 40-round magazines. If the member from Alberta ever wants to go hunting, he should let us know. We will make sure that there is no one else around. A hunter who needs a 40-round semi-automatic weapon is a problem.

That is the main problem with the long gun registry. Guns that are in no way connected to hunting or even protecting farmland are legalized.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is quite right. One of the big holes that I pointed to in my speech is this treatment of not just hunting weapons, but all non-restricted and non-prohibited weapons, which includes sawed-off shotguns, which are manufactured as short-barrelled shotguns, and the Ruger Mini-14. It includes many very dangerous weapons that have nothing to do with hunting or sports shooting.

He is quite right and I really hope that at report stage we might at least be able to convince the government that there needs to be an acceptance of the NDP's amendment to ensure these kinds of guns are not freely available on our streets.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear the earlier answer of my colleague. I did not understand in that area of Canada there were actually people who continued to hunt, and I am pleased to hear that

I have been an avid hunter for years, raised in northern Alberta, with many reserves in my constituency, about 19 in total. I am a registered trapper. In fact, I have three brothers who have traplines and continue to trap and have lodges and many aboriginal families continue to rely on moose, bear and elk for sustenance. I was pleased to hear that from the member. I understand he has been involved as an academic on some police boards and I am glad to hear that as well.

I had the opportunity to be a criminal lawyer in what I and most Canadians would consider to be probably the number one boom town of this century, and that being Fort McMurray. I was a very active litigator back in the nineties. I had the opportunity to defend murderers and people found guilty of aggravated assault.

Overall, guns were used a very small amount of time to commit these kinds of crimes. Members might be surprised to hear that knives were the predominant weapons of choice by these individuals. Indeed, I defended one particular person who was charged with murder. She killed her husband with a knife and was finally convicted of that, but as a result of other circumstances, battered wife syndrome, she received a lenient sentence.

I remember one particular occasion where an individual was stabbed with a fishing knife they were using to cook. I do remember some incidents where guns were used, but not where they were used to commit murder. When guns were successful in killing someone, it was usually done by accident. That is what I would like to talk a bit about today.

However, first, I want to advise the House and all those Canadians listening that I am totally in support of ending the long gun registry. I also want to thank the member for Yorkton—Melville, who was someone I particularly aspired to meet, prior to becoming a member of Parliament, because of his belief in ending the long gun registry and the waste it had caused.

I represent about 180,000 people who live in my constituency. I have lived there for 47 years. I want to let the House and Canadians know that during the time I ran for office and until this day, ending the long-gun registry is still the number one issue in my riding. In fact, an individual could raise more money by speaking about ending the long gun registry in politics than any other issue in my riding and, I understand, any other issue in western Canada. With that in mind, I suggest it is a very important issue for the people of western and rural Canada.

It is good to have a debate about this issue and I clearly understand, from listening to the members opposite, that there are issues on both sides of it. However, clearly, after this amount of time, I do not think there are any valid reasons to keep the long gun registry. Certainly, with my experience as a criminal lawyer, I do not believe police officers should rely on this instrument. Nor do I believe it is successfully utilized by them.

One of the things people need to do is educate themselves about firearms, first and foremost. I received a gift of a firearm when I was 12 years old. The first gift I remember receiving was a Remington .22 single shot rifle. I remember opening that gift at Christmas time and it was one of the greatest things I ever had.

My parents and older brothers trained and educated me on the use of the rifle. That is because they used weapons on a full-time basis on the trap lines and to provide food for our table. My father would not allow me to use the weapon for the longest period of time until I was fully trained on it and I understood the basic rules for its use.

I agree, quite frankly, with some of the rules that are currently in the Criminal Code with respect to weapons, one being locking up weapons. My father and my brothers locked up their weapons. They ensured they were out of reach of children. They ensured that we understood fully that we did not point a weapon at another person, whether it be loaded or not, and we always considered the weapon to be loaded, whether it was or not.

● (1740)

I was taught the basic rules and that is clearly what needs to be done with children and those people who want to use weapons at any time. We have an education system on weapons and it is mandatory to take the course to own weapons. I think that is as important as it is for people to lock weapons up and keep them under control.

I have had friends and family members who have been shot by weapons. Usually, as I said, it was by accident. However, the person pulling the trigger is the one who needs to be punished, as well as the people who do not properly store their firearms, do not keep them under lock and key and allow them to be kept loaded.

Government Orders

A child was killed in Fort McMurray some 25 years ago. He was the brother of a friend of mine. He was killed at the young age of 12 years old. However, the person who had that weapon was storing it incorrectly and was punished for that. I think that is the proper thing to do.

This is very similar to other pieces of property. Vehicles are utilized on a daily basis in Canada but they can be used as a weapon. Certainly, under the Criminal Code, people do use them as a weapon and try to kill or maim other people. They are licensed but most people can drive vehicles who are over the age of 16 or 18 in this country.

Clearly, we need to ensure that people are adequately educated on weapons and that they keep track of them and store them. However, \$2 billion spent on a gun registry that, quite frankly, accomplishes nothing is something that I do not think most Canadians agree with. In my riding, as I have said, it is still the number one issue.

We know there is a lack of knowledge on the other side in particular when we hear the previous member and members from other parties refer to sniper rifles. This was thrown around by the NDP as empty rhetoric. It only serves to confuse Canadians about what the real issues are. The opposition tries to pull emotional issues out, which do not really help in the debate. I do like having a good debate on this issue but I want to clarify once and for all that a sniper rifle is just a rifle that is used by a sniper. The terminology means nothing other than that. There is nothing more and nothing less to what a sniper rifle is. There is no difference between that firearm described by my colleague, the member for St. John's East, and any high-powered rifle used by hunters and target shooters. This type of misinformation shows, at best, a lack of basic firearm knowledge.

I am not sure of the name of the previous speaker's riding because it is the big city for the most part, but his basic knowledge and understanding of the firearms registry is merely an attempt by the NDP to confuse Canadians. It is misinformation that really does not add anything to the debate. In fact, I saw some NDP billboards featuring silhouettes of various firearms. These billboards of the firearms were used to confuse Canadians because those weapons are already restricted or prohibited and would not change under this new law.

Why would they put those pictures of prohibited and restricted weapons on the billboards? I think it goes further to what I am trying to put forward. They are adding nothing to the debate except to fear-monger and cause confusion for Canadians who are not educated on these particular issues.

It does come back to education. The issue here is that there are real arguments on the side of those people who want to get rid of this archaic and expensive piece of legislation that actually does nothing to keep Canadians safe. There are farmers, ranchers, hunters, trappers and sport shooters who have broken no laws and yet are criminalized by people who have nothing to do with it except on the basis of academia, such as the previous member.

Education is necessary in this place and it is for Canadians on the use of firearms and what they can do with those firearms. Children need to be trained and the people who utilize these weapons need full training and a full understanding of what they can do, because

they can kill. However, it is the person who pulls the trigger who kills and not the rifle.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is telling us that the registry is not foolproof insurance. But is that not the case for any insurance? According to the Conservatives, the registry should be destroyed because it is not 100% effective. According to this logic, Canadians should not only cancel their home insurance, they should burn down their house.

How can my colleague assess the real effectiveness of the registry if he will not consider the opinion of the police who use it?

• (1750)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry but something must have been lost in translation. I am not sure what insurance policy the member is referring to. I do not think I referred to that in my remarks.

However, in relation to the member's comments generally, as a criminal lawyer I recognize one thing and that is that criminals do not register their guns. They do not have any respect for the law. To suggest that in some way registering guns will keep Canadians safe is absolutely ludicrous. It does not do anything for that. In fact, it will be the criminals who have the guns and the law-abiding citizens who will not. I have 14 rifles and I can assure members that the process for registering is ridiculous, has been ridiculous forever and is not accurate at all.

I am not sure what the member is talking about but criminals do not register their guns. They buy their guns and bring them over the border or get them shipped in. It is impossible to keep that under control. What we can do is ensure that the people who disobey the law and do use weapons to commit crimes are punished, and that is what this Conservative government is doing. We are ensuring that the people who do the crime do the time. The NDP should join us in that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I extend to my hon. friend from Fort McMurray—Athabasca an invitation to visit southern Vancouver Island because it is not all big cities and lots of people go hunting. I am sure we could show him a good time if he came for a visit.

In the meantime, I wonder if he noticed the use of the long gun registry in another recent event. I mentioned earlier in response to my friend from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca the use of the long gun registry in solving a crime just this week in Saanich. There was also an event just 11 days ago in the Sudbury area in which the long gun registry helped the police solve a crime.

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The evidence from the police and particularly from the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs, despite the individuals here and there who have been made so much of by the Conservative Party benches, show that overall, as the many incidents confirm, they use the long gun registry to solve crimes. What will they use in its absence?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, how about police officers? It would be nice if the member from the Green Party and the members from the NDP would actually support this government when we put money into front-line police officers because they are the ones who actually solve the crimes.

To suggest that a computer system that is utilized by some police officers will be accurate on a continuous basis or that it will keep police officers or other Canadians safe is ludicrous. It is not kept up to date. There is no way to track the firearms themselves.

People may be able to pull a couple of things out of the air here and there to say that it has been effective but it has not been effective \$2 billion worth. That is a lot of front-line police officers who can be trained and put on the streets to ensure Canadians are kept safe, because that, ultimately, is what it is about.

The NDP and the members opposite keep voting against those front-line police officers. That is why the police officers support the Conservative government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that I have very little time remaining, I would like to address my comments to the Conservative member, who I believe is just as reasonable as I am. The registry is not perfect but the NDP has made some suggestions that find a middle ground between abolishing the registry and maintaining it, such as decriminalizing the failure to register a firearm for first-time offenders and issuing the person involved a fine instead, or else indicating in the legislation that long gun owners would not have to absorb the registration costs. We proposed other amendments to the bill that the Conservatives refused to accept.

I am a reasonable politician and I believe that he is as well. Why did the Conservatives refuse to accept these amendments?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that I am reasonable but keeping the long gun registry is not reasonable. It is not effective and it is not cost effective. I believe that users who use certain things like registries should pay for that. The NDP does not agree with that. Somebody has to pay for it ultimately. Bluntly, I think that Canadians need to pay for everything we do in this place, and we should keep that in mind when we bring forward ineffective programs like the long gun registry has been.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand and speak firmly against Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, ending the long-gun registry act.

For any Canadians watching, I think a fair summary of this legislation would say that it would do two things: First, it would eliminate the requirement to register non-restricted firearms or long guns; and second, it would destroy existing records of long gun

registration that are currently held in the computer system accessed by police.

As a registration certificate would no longer be required to possess a non-restricted firearm, if this bill passes, certain offences in the Firearm's Act are amended or appealed and the Criminal Code would also be amended so that failure to hold a registration certificate for a non-restricted firearm would not give rise to any of the offences relating to unauthorized possession of a firearm and it would not allow police to seize a firearm. Previous versions of government bills to dismantle the registry did have a requirement for people to check that the person they were selling or giving away their long gun to was a licensed firearm owner. Earlier versions of this bill also allowed for businesses to keep records of the sale of long guns, as was the practice prior to the registry. This bill contains neither provision.

What I have learned since coming to the House and participating in this debate over the last three and a half years has been that this is a big country and we bring many different sensibilities to this debate of the long gun registry. I have noticed that there are differences regionally, socially and culturally. Part of a healthy democracy is that people come from various parts of our broad fabric and bring the different perspectives of the people who live in their riding. That is healthy and that has informed this debate. I commend all members of the House for their contributions to this debate. I also want to give my particular position on the bill and also try to represent what I think is the broad consensus of the people in Vancouver—Kingsway.

Here is how I basically approach the issue of gun registration. I operate from the assumption that a firearm, whether it is long gun, a handgun or any kind of gun, is inherently a dangerous product. It is one of those products that when used exactly as designed has the capacity to harm, injure or kill people or anything living. I come from the basic position that anyone who has the right to own such an implement has a corresponding responsibility and duty to ensure that dangerous product has certain parameters around it. Those include knowing where that object is and ensuring the object cannot be used to hurt other people. I come from the general perspective that tracking the possession of that implement, tracking the sale of it, is a good thing. I come from the point of view that us knowing where those dangerous items are is something that makes our society safer.

I also have come to believe, after talking to many police officers across the country, that the gun registry helps them solve crimes. We all know that there are many thefts and break-ins across the country on a daily basis. None of us likes that but it is a reality of Canadian life. When a gun is stolen and subsequently used in a crime, I am told by police officers that locating that gun, finding out where it was originally registered and what residence it was registered to, helps them trace it back to its original owner and helps them, ultimately, to solve crime with that piece of evidence. I think that a gun registry imbues those who own guns with a feeling of responsibility.

It has been said a few times, and I do not want to make light of this, that we licence dogs and cars in our country. We licence certain fertilizers because there are constituent parts that can be used to make bombs. When people go into hardware stores to buy simple fertilizers, we make those stores keep a registry of who buys the fertilizers because we recognize that they are dangerous products and if they get into the wrong hands they can cause injury and death.

● (1755)

I also think of the balance of convenience. What is being asked of Canadians when we establish a gun registry? We are asking people that as a consequence of their privilege and right to own that weapon they simply fill out a registration form which indicates to authorities that they are the registered owner of that particular item.

What inconvenience is caused to people? There is a lot of rhetoric on all sides of the House on this issue. In my sincerely held belief, we are not asking duck hunters and farmers to do much. We are not asking them to give up the right to own a firearm. They can own 10 firearms if they want. We are simply asking them to register their firearms as a sign of responsibility, just as we would ask them to do if they purchased a car, which they would do without complaint.

There has been a lot of talk by the government about there being no evidence of the efficacy and effectiveness of the gun registry. That is not my understanding and it is not my research.

A vast number of police forces across the land are supportive of the gun registry. They are not unanimous, but there is no unanimity on any issue in this country. I will read a couple of quotes.

Bill Blair, the chief of police in Toronto and the past president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, said:

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

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

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

The government talks a lot about victims. It claims to support the rights of victims better than any other party in the House, which I doubt, but that is what it says. Sue O'Sullivan, the federal victims' ombudsperson, said:

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

My friends opposite stand in the House and say there is no evidence from police, victims or anybody in this country that the gun registry is desired or supported, but that simply is not true. I have just given the House some examples of hundreds of quotes from police officers, victims' groups, people who work in the criminal justice system across this country who tell us on a daily basis that the long gun registry is effective in preventing and solving crimes and keeping people safe. This is coming from police officers, women, people who might be contemplating suicide.

It is a little surprising that the Conservatives want concrete proof positive of a direct causative relationship between the gun registry and saving lives. With the greatest of respect, I do not need that. We accept many things in life. In this chamber we make decisions. We pass laws that are based on the best educated information and evidence that if we take a certain step it will likely result in a different step. We do this with tax law for instance. If we provide a tax cut to corporations, the government suggests it will lead to a certain behaviour by those corporations, and that they will invest, or so goes the argument. Does the government have evidence of that? Is

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there concrete empirical evidence of that? Probably not, but we make that decision based on the best evidence and our best reasoning.

The same thing I would respectfully suggest applies to the gun registry. If we tell people that if they want to own a firearm, a weapon that can kill, maim and injure, then registering that weapon will make our country slightly safer. That to me is intuitively correct.

I want to talk about what differentiates our country from the country to the south. In our country we have had much tighter firearms regulations. I have always felt that makes Canada a safer place. We do not have the level of gun violence that there is in the United States. The major reason for that is that we have tighter gun regulations, and Canadians support that.

● (1800)

The Conservative government says that criminals will not register guns, but every member on the government side says the government stills want to have the registration process of the gun owner. Criminals do not apply for a firearms acquisition certificate either.

With the greatest of respect, this is sound public policy. I agree that a lot of money has been wasted by previous governments, but that money is sunk. This is a valuable tool for police and the people of this country. I urge all members of this House to put ideology aside and vote to keep our communities safe.

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, most of the people who have talked to me about the gun registry have asked me the same question. Where did the \$2 billion spent on the registry go? People want to know where that money went before the registry is destroyed.

The Conservatives are so obsessed about economics, so why are they not asking themselves that question? Sure, they inherited a messed-up registry from the Liberals, but most of the mismanagement that made the registry so inefficient happened on the Conservatives' watch. Should the government not have a duty to the public to at least try to find out where the money went before destroying the registry?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I agree with members on the government side when they point out what appears to be an unconscionable amount of money spent in setting up the registry by the previous Liberal government. I share that concern.

The 2006 Auditor General's report suggested that the entire Canadian firearms program, not just the registry, had hit \$946 million by 2005. Recent information has also pointed out that the cost of the registry alone has stabilized at about \$4 million of the total annual cost of \$76.5 million for the Canadian firearms program. While all Canadians regret the amount of money that went toward setting up the registry, that money is gone, and it is a very small amount of money that is needed to keep the registry going.

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We know the police access the registry 17,000 times a day. Police are using it. It is a valuable tool being utilized every day by police. I do not think we should throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver Kingsway talked about the need for first responders to know whether or not a gun is on site. He said that the licensing system in and of itself does not let them know how many guns are there, but the registry would let them know. In fact, it should be called a gun tracking system, not a registry system.

Does the member think that a police officer or a first responder should go in assuming there is a weapon? Would there be more value in going in knowing there may be a weapon? Could he talk about the value of knowing as opposed to having to assume?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, that is an astute question. A key moment for me in making up my mind on this issue occurred when I was talking to police officers at an annual Canadian Police Association event on the Hill. I asked officers that very question. They told me that when they go to a house at 11:30 at night and it is dark, they will assume there are guns around. However, if they do not know, they are going to presume that there is one there and they will go around the back yard on high alert. If they see a shadow, if they see a cat move, they will not take any chances; their guns will be drawn. However, if they know there are no guns there, they will go in a little differently. They are always on alert but they will not go in on the same level of alert.

I hear catcalls from non-police officers on the government side. That is not what I said; it is what police officers told me. I take a lot more seriously what our men and women who are protecting us on the streets every day say.

The vast majority of police on the streets will tell us that they want the gun registry. It helps them do their job. It helps keep them safe. I will stand up for keeping police officers safe even if the Conservative government will not when it puts ideology above the safety of police officers.

• (1810)

BILL C-19—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must advise that an agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) concerning the proceedings at report stage and third reading of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms 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. My plan is to allot one further day of debate at report stage and two days for third reading.

REPORT STAGE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am definitely honoured to speak to Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry act.

We are delivering on our government's commitment to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. We have

been clear and straightforward with Canadians. It is no secret that we have consistently opposed the long gun registry. For going on 17 years we have said that we are going to scrap it. I am truly excited to say that this is finally coming to fruition.

Last May Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to carry out their priorities. That means jobs. That means economic growth. That means a fair immigration system. That means safe streets and communities. That also means ending the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

Every member on this side of the House and every candidate who stood under the banner of the Conservative Party of Canada has stood shoulder to shoulder with law-abiding farmers, hunters and sports shooters all across this great land.

Our government believes that the requirement to register long guns has needlessly and unfairly targeted law-abiding Canadians. This may seem like a simple statement, but it is worth repeating. Criminals are predisposed to breaking the law and going against society. I say it is simple, but it is very clear that the NDP, the Liberals and all those who support the long gun registry do not understand this simple truism. If people are predisposed to breaking the law, why on earth would anyone think they would comply with needless, complicated paperwork? The answer is simple and clear to all reasonable people. It does not happen. Criminals do not register their guns.

I am confident when I stand here to assure everyone that the government has carefully examined all sides of the argument. I can unequivocally state that the long gun registry has been nothing but wasteful and totally ineffective.

Bill C-68 was introduced by Allan Rock and the Liberals in 1995 in the wake of the tragedy that took place at École Polytechnique. The horrific events that unfolded on December 6, 1989 are truly unbearable not only for the victims but also for Canadians as a whole. Let me state that the long gun registry did not, could not and would not have prevented Marc Lépine from taking the lives of those innocent women. There is no evidence that the long gun registry has ever stopped a single crime or saved a single life.

According to our state broadcaster, the CBC, since the long gun registry was created, it has cost Canadians in excess of \$2 billion. That is money that should have been used to crack down on real crime and real criminals, not law-abiding farmers, hunters and sports shooters.

The majority of homicides committed in Canada did not even involve long guns. Statistics show that rifles and shotguns are not the problem. In reality, they are not the weapon of choice for criminals. The weapons used in crimes are primarily handguns which will continue to be registered. They are also usually illegally smuggled across the border or stolen and are not being caught by the registry.

Our government does believe that the right gun control laws do save lives, and our government will continue to take action to make our streets and communities safer.

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Bill C-19 would continue the strict system of controlling restricted and prohibited firearms. Firearm owners who wish to acquire a firearm or ammunition would still require a valid licence. That would mean they must maintain a clean criminal record, pass a firearms safety course, as well as comply with all firearms safe storage and transportation requirements.

What Bill C-19 would specifically do is repeal the requirement for licensed firearms owners to register their non-restricted firearms. It is simple and it is practical.

• (1815)

All reasonable people agree that there is no need to continue a regime that has had no discernible effect in accomplishing its goal. This bill would also delete all the records of law-abiding long gun owners in the registry, as well as records under the control of chief firearms officers.

Some have criticized this portion of the bill. I would like to discuss why it is fundamental to fully scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. By force of the Criminal Code, the strongest power available to any government, data on law-abiding firearms owners has been collected over the last several years. By eliminating the registry, we would be returning some sanity to Canadian firearm laws. We could focus our efforts on real measures that have real results.

The question remains: What would happen to the data that was collected during the unfortunate period when the government decided to turn on its citizens and needlessly infringe on their privacy? To members on this side, the answer is very clear. In order to fully scrap the long gun registry, one must eliminate it in all its forms. Future gun owners would not be required to register their property. Current gun owners should be afforded the same protection of their privacy. Upon royal assent, the data would be destroyed.

To draw an analogy to illustrate this point, I would like to reference comments made by the Minister of Public Safety. He said that ending the long gun registry but keeping the data is akin to a farmer saying that he will sell his farm to someone so long as he gets to keep the land.

I have had the good fortune of campaigning in the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for the last five elections. The good people of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry decided to elect me four of those times. During those campaigns, not once did a person tell me that he or she would not vote for me because I supported the long gun registry. On the other hand, literally hundreds of people stopped me when I was campaigning and asked where I stood on the long gun registry. I told them that I supported the abolition of the long gun registry and they said I had their votes.

I heard some comments earlier about police officers. I can tell the House that police officers in uniform stopped me when I was campaigning and asked me that very question. When they heard that I supported the abolition of the long gun registry, they said they would vote for me and support me. As a matter of fact, in the last few elections off-duty police officers distributed lawn signs for me because I was in favour of abolishing the long gun registry.

Last May, when Canadians went to the polls, they made their choice loud and clear. They voted for a strong, stable majority

Conservative government that will deliver on its promises. I would like those Canadians to join me today in saying our government has delivered. I am delighted that we will finally scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to get my head around this bill in some ways. I understand the Conservatives campaigned on getting rid of the long gun registry. What confuses me is this additional clause to destroy all the data that is associated with the registry.

I come from an academic background. Simon Fraser University is one of the best criminology schools in all of Canada. I am sure it could use this data to help police solve crimes. I would like to know if there will be any exemptions to allow academic researchers to access the registry as long as all the names are kept anonymous.

• (1820)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, we cannot eliminate the gun registry without destroying the data. With all due respect, I wonder how that question could originate on the NDP side.

With all due respect, many New Democrats lost the last election over flipping on the gun registry. I find it a little bizarre that members of the NDP are questioning the government going ahead with eliminating the gun registry. Canadians want to eliminate the gun registry. How much clearer can that be? They voted the Conservative government into a majority position partly for that very reason. What is it going to take for members of the official opposition to get it? Canadians do not want this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I want to comment on the government House leader. He walked into the chamber and declared that he does not have the ability to negotiate with the House leaders of the opposition parties. Once again, he gave notice of time allocation, which is another form of closure, preventing members from having debate and asking questions on important legislation.

This is indeed important legislation. The Province of Quebec sees value in the gun registry. It says that if Ottawa wants to cancel the gun registry, it still wants to go ahead and have a gun registry for that province.

What does the member think his constituents would say if the Prime Minister said we could give the data bank to Quebec, but instead, we are getting rid of it? The Conservatives would spend millions of dollars to get rid of the data bank. Yet the Province of Quebec would have to spend millions more dollars to regenerate that same data bank. The taxpayers in his riding say that is a waste of tax dollars.

Does he not see the waste of tax dollars? Does he not see that money could be better spent providing more community police officers in the province of Quebec?

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Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, this is wonderful. I cannot believe this, coming from a member of a party that wasted \$2 billion of taxpayers' money on a totally ineffective gun registry. It is unbelievable that he would ask that question. I have an answer for him. The people in my riding are telling me we cannot get rid of the gun registry without destroying the data and to please ensure the data is destroyed.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to try to clarify for the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry that there is a reason there is an exemption in this piece of legislation. It is so unusual to require that data be destroyed. We could indeed end the registry. No one would update it. It would not be used for purposes. The registry would be over, but the data would remain in place for archives and research of sociologists.

The archives of the Government of Canada are full of information from regimes that are no longer being used. The information is available for research. I really find it troubling that this key point is so hard to communicate.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, we know that the truth of the matter is the data is totally ineffective. Police officers have told me. These are the police officers who put my signs on their lawns and on other people's lawns. They tell me the information is totally incorrect. It is not reliable.

Why would one want to keep information that is totally useless, wasteful and way too costly?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over two decades ago, on December 6, 1989, 14 women died in the Montreal massacre. Their murders devastated our country and changed the lives of students at school, women around the country, and all Canadians and their families.

We went to vigils, we walked the street in take back the night marches, and we said, "Never again". Their senseless deaths triggered the Canadian movement towards stronger gun control. In 1995 the Firearms Act was passed. The law is recognized by the victims' families as a monument to their memory.

The government claims to stand up for crime prevention, victims and police officers. However, victims are asking in whose interest is loosening gun control in Canada. Chief William Blair, past president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said that this is about public safety. He said:

The registry has made Canada a safer country. The registry has saved lives. We lose it at our peril.

Police officers put their lives on the line for Canada each day. Canadians should know that of the last 18 police officers killed, 14 of them, or 78%, were killed by long guns. Police across Canada use the gun registry more than 17,000 times per day. They say it helps them evaluate a potential safety threat when they pull a vehicle over or are called to a residence. They also say it helps support police investigations. The registry can help determine if the gun was stolen, illegally imported, acquired or manufactured.

The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the government's own ombudsman for victims of crime, police forces across this country and the Coalition for Gun Control, an organization that includes families whose daughters were murdered in Montreal in

1989, have all called upon the government to keep the long gun registry.

According to an Ipsos Reid poll published in the *National Post* last year, two-thirds of Canadians support the registry.

The YWCA says that "dismantling the long gun registry puts women's lives at risk".

The Canadian Women's Foundation reports:

We are particularly disturbed that there appears to be no recognition of the strong link between long guns and violence against women.

When a woman is murdered by her partner with a gun, almost 75% of the time she is killed with a long gun not a hand gun. The link is so strong that the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs has called long guns the weapons of choice when it comes to domestic violence. Too many women in rural and remote communities are intimidated and controlled by partners wielding shotguns and rifles. With the registry gone, these weapons will be impossible to track, placing women at increased risk.

Violence against women is a \$4 billion tragedy in Canada. Every year 100,000 women and children leave their homes, fleeing violence and abuse. Almost 20,000 women go to 31 YWCA shelters across Canada looking for safety.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women requires that countries party to the convention take all appropriate steps to end violence. Why, then, would Canada destroy the long gun registry which protects women and girls, particularly with Canada leading the global effort for an international day of the girl?

Why is the government refusing to listen to the voice of experts, to the voice of Canadians? The government claims to be interested in public safety, yet is rejecting an initiative that police agencies say is vital to their work and to protecting victims. This is impossibly disturbing.

Sue O'Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, has said most victims' groups want the registry maintained. She said:

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

Why is the government refusing to listen to evidence?

● (1825)

Since the introduction of stricter gun laws in 1991, there has been a 65% reduction in homicides by long guns. From 1995 when the registry became law to 2010 there was a 41% reduction in homicides by long guns.

Government Orders

While the government rejects the notion that it is ending the long gun registry based on ideology rather than facts, government action a few months ago contradicts this. Recently the Minister of Public Safety tabled a list of the experts serving on his firearms advisory committee, in response to a written question by a Liberal MP. The minister's advisory committee includes several people who appeared before a parliamentary committee last fall to support government legislation to scrap the long gun registry. The minister's advisory committee did not disclose its membership to the MPs on the parliamentary committee.

We need evidence-based policies, not biased policies. It is pure bias to have a witness on a parliamentary committee supposedly appearing as an individual with a personal point of view but who is actually an appointee of the government there to bolster the government's position.

The government wants to get rid of the long gun registry. It claims that it is ineffective at reducing crime, although evidence shows that is absolutely false. Also, the government claims that it is wasteful. Let us look at the evidence.

We acknowledge that it did cost more than \$1 billion to set up the registry in 1995. However, today, the best estimate is that it costs a mere \$4 million to operate. In stark contrast, the total annual cost of firearm related injuries in Canada was \$6.6 billion. Gun violence alone, which includes suicide, has been calculated at costing over \$100 billion in the United States. In Canada, the cost of gunshot wounds per survivor admitted to hospital is \$435,000. Economic studies show that preventive interventions to stop interpersonal violence save more than they cost, in some cases by several orders of magnitude.

We repeatedly hear from the government that it is committed to ensuring that hard-earned taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. If that is the case, why will the government not keep the long gun registry that saves lives and reduces economic costs?

Finally, the government is failing to hear the voices of provinces and police agencies who are asking that they be able to continue to consult the database. Our leader has said that the data collected over the last 16 years must be preserved so that provinces can salvage this important policing tool. The government claims it cannot help because the Privacy Act forbids collecting data for one purpose and then transferring it to be used for another purpose.

The government is not only ignoring evidence now but also actually destroying data. The government has said that it would be of no assistance to provinces that want to set up their registries. The Minister of Public Safety has said:

We've made it very clear we will not participate in the recreation of the long-gun registry and therefore the records that have been created under that long gun registry will be destroyed.

In closing, I do not support the bill, which will destroy the long gun registry and its data; jeopardize the health of Canadians, particularly that of women; and cost society billions. What is at stake is not a piece of paper or a requirement that people might have. What is at stake is people's lives.

● (1830)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, having been involved in police work for over 20 years, I can say there were times when I was faced with some compromising situations. However, one of the things I did hear in the member's speech was that 17 police officers had died by a long gun since the registry has been in place.

My question is this: why did it not save their lives and why did it put their lives in so much peril? What could she suggest to make any difference?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question and his work in policing.

My perspective is from having worked for many years with young people at university. I taught women's health and I worked at shelters. Every year when I talked about violence against women, my students would come up to me at the end of the class and tell their stories. I had one student who was not only threatened by one man but also by two other men with a weapon. The reality is that at the YWCA, women have told us that the guns used in the north predominantly for hunting, that is long guns, are also used to intimidate, subdue and control women. We hear this over and over again in small communities without the RCMP and in large communities with the RCMP.

Women do not want these guns to be unregistered. They do not feel safe expressing this opinion other than in whispers to people who may be able to voice these unpopular opinions and who may be heard. From the shelters in my riding, they want me to express the position of women.

● (1835)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, throughout the day, we have heard a lot about the so-called strong mandate of the government to get rid of the long gun registry. Of course, the Conservatives only have a small majority in the House, but 65% of Canadians, I understand, want to keep the long gun registry. They believe it performs a valuable public service.

Does the member agree with that statement? Or does he agree with the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry who very excitedly, a few minutes ago, was saying that people want to get rid of the registry and that they elected them and so the government should get rid of it? Or should the Conservatives listen to the will and the voices of lots of Canadians other than those who continue to write them letters and cheer them on?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. The Ipsos Reid poll shows that 66% of Canadians want this registry. As members of Parliament, our job is to reflect the voices of Canadians. We hear from the experts and from Canadians and they want the registry, whether they are emergency physicians or police chiefs.

Business of Supply

Most of the women who are murdered are killed by their husbands, partners or ex-partners. Many are killed in rages, when the man has reached for his hunting gun.

Since the introduction of stricter gun laws in 1991, there has been a 65% reduction in homicides by long guns. From 1995 to 2010, there was a 41% reduction in homicides by long guns. The number of women killed with shotguns has fallen every year. The Transition House Association of Nova Scotia states:

The long-gun registry has made a significant difference in the safety of women in Canada since its inception in 1995. The rate of spousal homicide by gun has gone down by 69 per cent and we attribute most of that to the impact of the gun registry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before recognizing the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, I will let him know that we have two or maybe three minutes and then we will have to finish.

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in this House to continue the report stage debate on Bill C-19, the ending the long-gun registry act. As my hon. colleagues know, this bill seeks to eliminate the threat of jail time for people in this country who do not register their non-restricted firearms.

On the face of it, this seems like common sense. Hunting rifles and shotguns are the tools of the trade for many of those who farm our land and feed our cities. These law-abiding farmers simply want to work hard and sell their products without being criminalized for possessing what is needed to do their jobs. When I think about the debate on this issue and specifically how it affects our farmers, I am reminded of one of the famous lines from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. He stated:

What is the use of discussing a man's abstract right...? The question is upon the method of procuring and administering them. In that deliberation I shall always advise to call in the aid of the farmer...rather than the professor of metaphysics.

Burke was a great statesman and a great parliamentarian, and he was telling us to look toward those who do as opposed to those who pontificate when we are seeking a particular end. That particular end we seek is to protect our communities and families from criminals. To that end, our government has done common sense things. For example, we have introduced legislation that actually puts violent and repeat criminals behind bars.

Before we have to close for the evening, I would say that the opposition seeks the same ends that we do, to keep communities and Canadians safe. However, we differ on the approach to doing that. I will expand on that tomorrow when I am recognized again by the Speaker.

● (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley will have eight minutes remaining for his speech, and also five minutes for questions and comments when the House next resumes debate on the motion.

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—OLD AGE SECURITY

The House resumed from February 2 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:41 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of Madam Blanchette-Lamothe relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1905)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 109)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bennett
Benskin	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brison	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McQuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Murray
Nantel	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Patry	Pélet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie

Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
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Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel

Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Yelich
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Wilks
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)

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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

● (1910)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would ask all those who wish to continue their conversations to do so in their respective lobbies.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier I had risen in the House to ask the government a question about child poverty and had indicated the number of children who were living below the poverty line and having to utilize food banks.

I want to augment that question with some information that just came out from the Province of Ontario Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario, “Poverty Reduction in an Age of Uncertainty & Change”. I want to read a little from this report because it reflects conditions in other parts of Canada, whether it is British Columbia, Quebec or the Atlantic Provinces.

In this report it indicates that in Ontario “393,000 children still live in poverty”. It states:

We are already aware of the growing gap between the rich and the poor. As unemployment in Ontario remains above the Canadian average, especially for youth, and while social assistance rates stay unacceptably low, there is a real fear that the number of children living in poverty in Ontario may actually rise...

It goes on in the report, and I do not have time in my brief four minutes to talk about all of the aspects of this report, but the people look at the Ontario deprivation index. They look at 10 key items considered necessary for a decent standard of living.

When I read this list, members are going to be shocked. I think most of us just take this for granted. They say that these are items necessary for a household to have a standard of living above the poverty level. They are:

1. Being able to get dental care if needed.
2. Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as a stove or a toaster.
3. Being able to buy modest presents for family/friends at least once per year.
4. Appropriate clothes for job interviews.
5. Having friends or family over for a meal at least once a month.
6. Fresh fruit and vegetables every day.
7. Being able to get around your community, either by car or bus pass.
8. Hobby or leisure activity.
9. Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent at least once every other day.

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Bateman
Bernier
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carrie
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Dreeschen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lauzon
Leef
Lemieux
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
Obhrai
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Richardson
Saxton
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Benoit
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Chisu
Clement
Davidson
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoepfner
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Lake
Lebel
Leitch
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Rickford
Schellenberger
Shipley
Smith
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trotter
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to

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10. Having a home or apartment free of pests, such as cockroaches, bedbugs and mice.

This is hardly an extravagant list of what most of us would consider just normal, every day things to which we should be entitled.

They also point out in the report that in October 2011, only 27% of unemployed Ontarians received employment insurance, and that becomes relevant a little later in this report.

I want to touch on students for one moment. We know the importance of education in terms of lifting people out of poverty, but in the report it indicates:

Since 1990, undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 244%. It takes a low income family in Ontario 1,268 days to pay for a full cost of a university degree, compared to 137 days for a wealthy family. The high cost of education in the province means that many low to middle-income graduates start in jobs that are not in their career choice in order to pay off their student debt.

Later on in the report it refers to child care, and it is no surprise that child care is only available to one in five children in Ontario. There are some pretty shocking numbers in terms of the number of child care centres that are closing.

Although this is an Ontario report card, there are a couple of conclusions they reach for a role with the federal government. One is to press the federal government to introduce a national poverty reduction plan. Second is to press the federal government to improve access to employment insurance.

Going back to my original question, I once again ask the government this. Where is its comprehensive strategy to eliminate poverty that will actually make life better for children and their families?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan on the state of Canadian families.

As I have said here before, every action the government takes to help Canadians and their families is to help them become self-sufficient. Our approach to reducing poverty focuses on helping Canadians gain the skills to access opportunities which provide targeted supports against the barriers they face. There is concrete evidence of improvement and meaningful progress from our action plan.

Our government recognizes the family as the foundation of society. That is why we give families the right to choose the child care they want for their child. That is why we backed up this commitment by investing more than \$14 billion this year in benefits for children and families. These include the Canadian child tax benefit, the national child benefit supplement, the universal child care benefit and the child tax credit, which all serve to help Canadian children get the best start in life as possible.

About 3.3 million families with 5.8 million children receive Canada's child tax benefit. That represents more children than the entire population of the greater Toronto area. Included in this number is the fact that over 1.5 million families with 2.7 million children receive the national child benefit supplement.

The national child benefit supplement provides tax free monthly benefits for children under the age of 18. The national child benefit supplement has been successful in reducing the incidence of families with children living in low income. It also reduces the severity of low income for those families who continue to live below the low income threshold.

Budget 2007 introduced the child tax credit which provided personal income tax relief of up to \$320 in 2011 for each child under the age of 18.

Budgets 2009 and 2010 included additional investments in Canadian families, including improvements to child benefits. For example, budget 2010 improved the taxation of the universal child care benefit to ensure that single parent families received tax treatment comparable to two parent families. It also allowed parents with joint custody to split benefits equally throughout the year when a child lives in both households. It enhanced the registered disability savings plan and doubled the working income tax benefit to \$1.1 billion this year, which helps ensure that low income families are financially better off as a result of getting a job.

Because of the actions this government has taken since 2006, an average family of four saves over \$3,000 a year in taxes.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

Our government is working very hard to ensure that Canadian families can get what they need to take advantage of all the opportunities they have before them.

[*English*]

Every action our government has taken to help Canadians and their families become independent allows them to contribute to the economy and to their local communities.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it clearly is missing the target. One in seven children in Ontario and their families are living in poverty and, in my own province of British Columbia, it is one in five children. British Columbia has one of the highest child and family poverty rates in the country. When it comes to aboriginal communities, one in four children and their families live in poverty.

Although the government has attempted to put in place some measures, it clearly is not doing the job.

The member opposite briefly mentioned child care. The reality in Ontario is that there are now 22,000 people in Toronto on a subsidy wait list for child care. The municipal centres are closing and the community not for profits are closing. We know that child care is important in terms of being able to find a job.

Once again I must ask the member opposite and the government where their national comprehensive plan is, which should be developed in conjunction with the provinces and territories, for a poverty reduction, poverty elimination strategy for this country.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, our government has implemented a number of measures to help families with low incomes families and their children. I will offer just one example and that is housing, which is one of the most important challenges these families have to confront.

Adjournment Proceedings

As we know, there is a continuing need for affordable housing and a broader range of housing choices for low income Canadians. More affordable housing also helps to promote economic growth. I am proud to say that we have invested more money in housing and homelessness initiatives than any other government in Canadian history. Our government invests \$134.8 million annually in the homelessness partnering strategy. This is a community-based program that helps people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve self-sufficiency.

The affordable housing framework is another federal, provincial and territorial initiative that addresses the diversity of affordable housing needs across the country.

In addition, budget 2010 allocated \$7.7 billion to stimulate the housing sector and improve social housing. Improving access to good quality, affordable housing is just one of the ways that we are helping families in need across the country.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the government repeatedly claims that it stands up for the environment and the economy, when has it actually stood up for the environment in the last many months? Was it when it slashed the budget of the federal environmental watchdog, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, by 43%, when it recklessly planned to cut over 700 scientists from Environment Canada, when it announced devastating cuts to ozone monitoring, or when it shamefully pulled out of the Kyoto protocol?

To be fair, in the last few weeks the government did announce an investment in climate adaptation and monitoring of extreme weather events. Unfortunately, the government misses the point. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions would reduce both adaptation costs and extreme weather events.

Finally, after six years in government, the Minister of the Environment announced an oil sands monitoring implementation plan last Friday. Unfortunately, it comes with an additional three year phase-in period, an unclear structure, unclear funding, and a question regarding expanded private money and its potential influence.

The government's regulatory capacity and commitment to actually manage environmental impacts continues to lag behind the pace and scale of new oil sands development. New projects continue to be improved, even though we do not have information to understand the impacts. This is not responsible management and is sadly demonstrated by the government's failure to take necessary action to protect the woodland caribou.

However, the question before us today is about climate change, its impacts, its costs and the need for a credible comprehensive plan.

Canadians know about climate change. We have had our climate change wake-up calls, such as the 1998 ice storm, which cost \$5.4 billion, and the 1996 Saguenay flood, which cost \$1.7 billion. These are just two examples of extreme weather events and in fact pale in comparison to last year's extremes in the United States, as well as in southern Canada, with 14 separate weather events which caused losses of \$1 billion or more each.

Today in the Canadian Arctic permafrost is melting. The annual thaw layer is deepening and damaging infrastructure. In British Columbia glaciers are retreating at rates not seen in 8,000 years. On the Prairies lake and river levels are lowering in summer and fall and are impacting agriculture. In Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland sea level rise and increased storminess are accelerating coastal and dune erosion.

Canadians should be highly critical of the government's abdication of leadership on climate change, specifically, its withdrawal from Kyoto and its performance in meeting international climate commitments, setting science-based emissions targets, developing incentives for low-carbon technologies, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, pricing carbon, and putting in place adaptation measures necessary to respond to the risks of climate change.

The Liberal government introduced project green in 2005, a comprehensive climate plan that would have got us 80% of the way to meeting our Kyoto targets. The Conservatives killed the plan when they became government and are now trying to rewrite history by calling the Kyoto protocol a blunder. Their only purpose is to mask their failure. While the government allocated \$9.2 billion in funds, it actually reduced its greenhouse gas emissions target by 90%. Now the government can only get us 25% of the way to its drastically reduced target. How is it going to get us the remaining 75%?

•(1920)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite made a comment about the government's abdication of leadership on climate change. As a young Canadian who sits here now as a government member, I am shocked that my colleague would list weather events and talk about all of these things when her party, when it was in government, patently failed the Canadian people with its failure in leadership on climate change.

In the original question she put to the House, she asked about a real plan to manage climate change, which is the subject of this adjournment proceeding. I would not consider a real plan to do things like signing on to the Kyoto protocol which, at the time, only included 30% of global greenhouse gas emitters. How can we have a global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions when we do not have an agreement on which all major emitters sign on to binding targets?

Adjournment Proceedings

Failure number one. After the Liberal government signed on to the Kyoto protocol, it had no plan to implement it. In fact, during its tenure, greenhouse gas emissions increased between 27% and 33% over the Kyoto targets, an inconvenient truth to be sure. In fact, Canada's CO₂ emissions rose between 1997 and 2005. That was abdication of leadership to be sure.

In 2008, the Liberals came up with a plan to talk about climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. They said that they wanted to implement a carbon tax, a tax on everything, which would fail Canadians in a major way by increasing prices and we could not really be sure about the results that would produce. This is the type of action we see from the Liberal Party.

Nine years of inaction later, the former Liberal leader summed up the Liberal's record on climate change by saying, "We did not get it done". I would like to contrast that with our government's leadership with regard to climate change.

First, we have taken a strong, bold, sector-by-sector regulatory approach that will see real reduction in greenhouse gas emissions looking at targeted sectors, including transportation, which we have already looked at. We are looking at the coal fire sector right now. We will be seeing reductions in greenhouse gases by 17% of 2005 levels by 2020. This is real action.

We have invested millions of dollars into climate change research and adaptation. These are investments that my colleague has voted against. We had over \$870 million over two years in our clean air agenda, \$252 million to support regulatory activities to address climate change and air quality and \$86 million to support clean energy regulatory action. Those were budgetary measures to see real action.

Moreover, now that we are seeing progress, we are seeing this plan work, including the oil sands monitoring network that my colleague talked about.

We heard from the International Institute for Sustainable Development. In a recent report, it noted that Canada was moving in the right direction on greenhouse gas policy and was establishing the policy architecture to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally we have a government is that doing something for greenhouse gas emissions and it is doing that by balancing the need for economic growth with environmental stewardship. This is a plan we can be proud of.

● (1925)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the government is failing Canadians and future generations. Adaptation costs by 2050 will be \$21 billion to \$43 billion. Young Canadians will not be able to afford that.

I had the privilege of consulting the department the parliamentary secretary is supposed to defend and I served on the intergovernmental panel on climate change, which shares the 2007 Nobel Prize.

The government should accept the science of climate change and table a comprehensive climate change plan. Rather than its sector-by-sector approach playing on the fringes, it should commit to attaining its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals that are supported internationally, which is the 17% below the 2005 level, and commit to keeping global warming to 2°C, which is associated with dangerous climate change.

Again, Canadians simply cannot afford the crippling climate change adaptation costs of \$21 billion to \$43 billion with which the government is saddling them.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, while my colleague has the message of doom, I have one of hope, and that is the fact that our government is moving forward with a comprehensive, robust plan to address greenhouse gas emissions in this country, including a sector-by-sector regulatory approach and taking an international leadership stance in saying that we need an agreement where all major emitters come to the table and commit to binding targets so that we can move forward in a comprehensive global fashion.

I am so proud of this government and where we are going on this file.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:29 p.m.)

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