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Monday, March 26, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 26, 2012

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1105)

[*English*]

OLD AGE SECURITY

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 307

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize the contributions that the baby boom generation has made in building Canada; (b) affirm its support for the Old Age Security program; (c) commit to maintaining the sixty-five year qualifying age contained in section 3 of the Old Age Security Act; and (d) recognize that Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, a program designed to help low income seniors, are inextricably linked and ensure that they continue to have identical ages of eligibility.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the matter of old age security. I would like to acknowledge the very hard and determined work of the hon. member for York West, the Liberal Party critic for pensions. My motion is a direct response to a petition signed by tens of thousands of Canadians who are troubled by the decision of the Prime Minister to change the age of eligibility for old age security.

I will outline a number of facts today.

A little under a year ago, someone made a promise. He made that promise during the last election. Here is what he said, “We’re not going to cut the rate of increase to transfers for health care, education and pensions. That is job number one.

It was the Prime Minister who made that promise. It is important to note when the Prime Minister made that promise. Was it when he called Canada a northern welfare state? Was it when he said that Atlantic Canadians suffer from a culture of defeat? Was it when he said that he would not touch income trusts? Was it when he advocated for a two tier health care system? Did he say it when, as part of his firewall plan, he called for Alberta to set up its own pension plan and, in doing so, rejected the very notion of a national system of pensions? Or, was it when he said, “providing for the poor is a provincial, not a federal responsibility”? No, the Prime Minister made the promise not to touch pensions on April 11, 2011, just three weeks before election day.

Two months ago, the Prime Minister announced in Switzerland that he intended to institute massive changes to old age security and, in consequence, mandate massive changes to the guaranteed income supplement as well. In less than 10 months, after getting his majority government, he broke his promise to seniors and future generations of pensioners.

Here is another fact. According to the Canada Revenue Agency, almost 4.4 million Canadians are in receipt of old age security. The vast majority of those seniors live pension cheque to pension cheque. Those of us here, I would suggest, will not need to worry about our retirement. We will not be living pension cheque to pension cheque. None of us here in this chamber will depend on the old age security to maintain a decent level of living when we retire. However, for millions of Canadians, the old age security and guaranteed income supplement provides them with a pension to live, not in comfort, but to meet the basic needs of food, heating oil and medication.

The Prime Minister gave his word and then broke his promise and it will be most vulnerable who will suffer. It will not be members here, but women, low income seniors and persons with disabilities.

Here is another fact. A report issued by the Prime Minister's own government tells us that current seniors whose income is less than \$20,000 rely heavily on old age security as well as the guaranteed income supplement. The two are linked. The government will change the age for old age security to age 67 or higher. What will happen to the guaranteed income supplement? Changing the age of eligibility from 65 to 67 or beyond also means that the GIS will be affected as people cannot obtain the GIS unless they are in receipt of old age security.

On Friday afternoon I received a frantic letter from the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, sent on an urgent basis, asking me to consider an amendment to remove any reference to the age of 65 in the motion before the House. Of course, the minister's suggestion is completely unacceptable. The Liberal Party will not accept any change that will raise the age of eligibility for old age security, period.

The present pension system works, it is not broken and any suggestion otherwise is simply not true. The current pension system provides all Canadians access to old age security and further provides those seniors who have little or no income beyond old age security the guaranteed income supplement.

Private Members' Business

I know many seniors whose entire income is based on the present system. To suggest, as the Prime Minister has, that future seniors already living week to week can now suddenly invest that extra \$10 they might have into a RRSP or some other private investment plan is, to be generous, a joke. However, it is not a laughing matter. It is very offensive.

We also know that women disproportionately rely on the guaranteed income supplement more than men. Twenty-four per cent of all women who are senior citizens qualify for and rely on the GIS.

A change of two, three or four years in eligibility may seem insignificant to us but to people who continue to live in a cycle of poverty waiting an extra two to four years is a lifetime. Yet, the government is spending billions on prisons, billions on fighter jets, adding new members of Parliament to the House, all the while unravelling our pension system.

However, this all makes sense when we read what the Prime Minister once said, "providing for the poor is a provincial, not a federal responsibility".

Furthermore, the argument presented by the Prime Minister to justify this broken promise is anchored in the idea that old age security is suddenly unsustainable. When did he first come to that revelation? Did he think that pensions were unsustainable last April when he promised not to touch them? We must remember what he said. He said, "We're not going to cut the rate of increase to transfers for health care, education and pensions. That is job number one".

Edward Whitehouse of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and an international expert on retirement and pensions said, "There is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pensions ages in the foreseeable future".

Jack Mintz, the government's own research director for the working group on retirement income, said this past January:

The overall view that was taken about our pension system in total, when you look at Old Age Security, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, as well as Canada Pension Plan, was that it is relatively financially sustainable.

Last April, the Prime Minister promised to leave pensions alone and now he is suggesting that old age security is unsustainable. We know that is not true. We now know that assertion is blatantly false.

The man he appointed as Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, told the truth when he said that the OAS was in fact sustainable. Jack Mintz told the truth when he said that old age security was sustainable. Edward Whitehouse of the OECD told the truth when he said that there was no pressing need to increase the age for obtaining the OAS pension. Who is not telling the truth and for what reason?

The OAS is sustainable and will be sustainable into the future. Last April, the Prime Minister believed old age security was sustainable too. We know this because he told Canadians, "We're not going to cut the rate of increase to transfers for health care, education and pensions. That is job number one". It really is disgraceful to give one's word and then break it and to do so based on manufacturing a crisis.

The Conservatives like to go on about its strong, stable, majority government but they did not seek a mandate to tear asunder a critical element of our social safety net. They did not seek a mandate to change the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67 or maybe 69 or more.

The Prime Minister told Canadians last April that he would not touch their pensions but this coming Thursday, budget day, he will officially break that promise and fundamentally alter the covenant made decades ago to support Canadian seniors.

• (1110)

I am aware that I am not permitted to suggest that the government lied or that it acted dishonestly for those comments are unparliamentary. However, when a prime minister makes a promise during an election, a promise to seniors and to future pensioners, to leave those pensions as they are and then announces after the election that he will make massive changes to old age security, then one must simply leave it to Canadians to figure out the value of his word.

• (1115)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Charlottetown, for this very important motion today and I would ask him what his understanding is in regard to this change.

It seems to me that it is a significant change to suggest that the retirement age be increased to age 67 from age 65 because we know that those who live on provincial benefits, those with health problems who are living with the challenges of disability, will lose those benefits at age 65. That means those same people will be without any income from age 65 to 67.

I wonder if the member for Charlottetown has heard any indication that the government consulted with the provinces, talked to them or even the private insurers about this very significant change.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, there has been absolutely no indication that there has been consultation with the provinces or with the business community with respect to this proposed change. This appeared to be some sort of a pronouncement from an alpine perch. It will, undoubtedly, result in either another download to the provinces or a huge gap for people who are presently supported by welfare systems in the various provinces to the age of 65, until the age of 67, where there will be absolutely no social safety net.

The other thing I would point out is that, for those people who are fortunate enough to be working as seniors at advanced age, this will have significant effect with respect to private disability plans as well. To the best of my knowledge, there is absolutely no indication that industry or the provinces were consulted with respect to this and it appears inevitable that they will likely be the ones forced to bear the costs.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the motion that has been brought forward by the member. The member is doing a great service for all Canadians from coast to coast who recognize that this is one of those issues that is fundamentally important. We are talking about retirement. At the end of the day there will be more seniors put into poverty as a direct result of what the government is doing.

Private Members' Business

Could the member highlight the impact this will have on seniors and poverty if the government is successful in raising the age from 65 to 67?

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, there are many seniors in the country who are dependent on provincial welfare payments for their basic needs. However, when they hit age 65, the federal system is more generous than many of the provincial systems with respect to old age security and guaranteed income supplement. Therefore, many seniors presently living in poverty look forward to the day that they turn 65 years of age.

This change will have a debilitating effect on society's most vulnerable. For those people who are presently living in poverty and who look forward to the day of hitting the age of 65, they will either be left completely without an income, if the gap is allowed to occur, or remain on the provincial rolls for an additional two years.

The change will have a devastating effect disproportionately on low income women and on those living with disabilities. Those in our society who are now the most vulnerable, those who are now living in poverty, they will be the ones who will bear the cost of this change.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 307 moved by the hon. member for Charlottetown regarding the importance of the old age security program and recognizing the value that seniors and those nearing retirement represent to our country.

It is my understanding that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has communicated directly with the member for Charlottetown indicating her general support for the motion should her request for an amendment be accepted.

As a government, we are committed to protecting the retirement income of Canadians for future generations, and we recognize that change is required to ensure the sustainability of the OAS program. As such, our amendment to the motion requests that the wording regarding a commitment to maintain 65 as the qualifying age for OAS be adjusted to state our commitment to maintaining the sustainability and affordability of the OAS program.

What more can we say to help our colleagues understand the urgency of taking action to cope with the changes posed by the demographic pressures our country is facing?

Our arguments are based on real facts. Canada's largest generation, the baby boomers, is getting older and is starting to retire. The life expectancy of a 65 year old has increased by five years since 1966, which means that the OAS recipients are collecting benefits longer. As the baby boomers continue to retire over the next decade and a half, the number of seniors in this country will grow dramatically. By 2030, for the first time in Canadian history, there will be more people over the age of 65 than young people under the age of 20. This will also cause the workforce to gradually get older.

Today there are four Canadians of working age for every retired person. In 2030 the ratio will be down to 2:1. In essence, the same number of workers as today will be supporting twice as many seniors by 2030. This is a global trend and it is even more marked in the developed countries like Canada. By now many other countries have

already taken steps to ensure the security of retirement income for future generations.

The Canada pension plan has been adjusted to ensure it remains viable over the long term. The latest Chief Actuary's report confirms that it is actually sound for the next 75 years.

However, no such changes have been made to the OAS, which is 100% funded by the tax dollar. Without taking responsible action now, the program will be at risk for future generations and our children and grandchildren will have to pay the price.

It is a question of fairness. The old age security program relies on the taxes paid in a given year to fund the benefits paid out that year. That is why the ratio of workers to seniors is critical to the fiscal sustainability of the program. One does not have to be an expert to understand that the lower the ratio of workers to seniors, the less tax revenue there is for government programs and services.

The global economic crisis has taught us that we cannot take anything for granted and that we are affected by the financial situation outside of Canada. Thanks to the strong economic leadership of our Prime Minister and our Minister of Finance, Canada has solid fundamentals, and we have emerged from the global recession better than other countries in the G7. However, as has been stated many times by our Prime Minister, we are not immune to shocks in the world markets and we cannot rest on our laurels.

We know about the problems our neighbours to the south are having, as well as our trading partners in the European Union. We do not want to make the same mistakes when it comes to deficit spending and shifting an ever-increasing burden to the next generation. Under these circumstances, we need to be prudent and accept our responsibilities.

That being said, we know that everything that pertains to public pensions has a profound influence on the important decisions that citizens need to take during their working life with regard to their level of savings and the year they plan to retire. That is why any changes we make to the OAS will not affect anyone who is currently collecting benefits, nor will it affect anyone nearing retirement.

As for the younger generations, those who are starting their working life and those who still have many years to work, they will have time to plan and adapt. We are telling younger workers about this now, not to pit one generation against another, but because they have a right to know what to expect. We are telling them that this is what the country is going to look like in eight, ten, twenty years from now. This is the reality and to pretend otherwise would be foolish.

Private Members' Business

●(1120)

After the Second World War the troops came home and started families. They were confident that the future was full of promise. Those children became the baby boomer generation. Canada's wealth and economic productivity expanded enormously as both men and women of that generation brought their values, knowledge, skills and energy to the labour market. Baby boomers have helped make Canada the strong country it is today. Many of us in this House are baby boomers. We can all agree that the baby boomers are responsible for much of the growth and prosperity we have seen in the last few decades.

There is no argument about recognizing the great contributions of that generation. However, demographics do not lie. Because of the unusual size of that generation, baby boomers are now beginning to retire in great numbers, and this will bring risks to the long-term growth of our economy.

Therefore, we are proposing to make changes now so that future generations can have the same financial security when they retire as their parents and grandparents did. These changes will not arrive tomorrow. We will give Canadians time to prepare for them, but we are not going to tell fairy tales. This story will not have a happy ending unless we do something now. If we do not act now in a responsible way, future generations will have much more difficult decisions in front of them.

If we stick our heads in the sand and fail to address this issue which we have all known for quite some time requires action, then future generations will pay the price. This would be a dangerous and reckless route to take.

We are a nation that is aging, and we know that this trend will continue to accelerate. We also know that the efforts the country can make to ensure financial security for its seniors depends on the number of workers relative to the number retired. The number of workers relative to the number of retired people will drop by half in fewer than 20 years. As we see it, these factors leave no doubt that it is vital to act now.

We have said many times that we will not touch the Canada pension plan, which is a contributory plan paid into by employers and employees. The CPP is solid and sustainable. However, the aging population will put long-term pressure on the OAS program.

The facts are clear. OAS expenditures, which are the largest single transfer paid to individual Canadians, are projected to rise from \$36.5 billion in 2010 to \$108 billion in 2030.

Since the OAS program is entirely financed by general tax revenues, this huge increase would raise the OAS portion from 13¢ of every tax dollar spent today to 21¢ of every tax dollar spent in 2030-31, placing this undue tax burden on younger generations of Canadians.

This also means that less funds would be available for children, families, health care, public safety and other programs. It is a program that would cost three times as much as it does now with the same number of workers to support it. Will it be sustainable if we do nothing? Yes, if we are willing to impose an excessive burden on future generations, raise taxes and rack up even greater debt.

For us, choices like these are irresponsible. That is why I am asking the member for Charlottetown and all members of the House for their co-operation to ensure the sustainability of the old age security program.

●(1125)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Charlottetown for bringing this important issue to the House of Commons. Old age security is a vital tool in the fight to prevent poverty among seniors. The suggestion by the Prime Minister to raise the age of qualification for OAS to 67 years would have a direct impact not on the wealthy but on the poorest seniors. That reality has not been lost on current seniors nor the seniors of the future. In essence, the government is saying that it wants the poor to pay for the financial mismanagement of the Conservatives. Not only is this unacceptable, but it is absolutely unfathomable.

Let us not forget that the House has passed unanimously several NDP opposition day motions all in support of seniors' financial security, yet the government threatens changes to the OAS in blatant disregard of the will of the House and in contempt of the seniors who built our nation. For the life of me I do not understand why the government is trying to create more challenges for seniors, who deserve our respect.

As the NDP seniors critic, over the last couple of months I have had the chance to talk to people. I also have received many emails and letters from seniors across Canada, all reacting to the Prime Minister's suggestion that there may be changes to old age security. People are outraged, insulted and scared, and rightly so. Canadians have carefully planned for retirement at age 65. They cannot manage the difficult struggle that would be required for them to wait until age 67.

If the government really cared about seniors and retirement security, it would make substantive changes to the GIS right now that would have a significant impact on the lives of retirees. Instead of giving less than half of what is needed to increase the GIS, the government would have listened to New Democrats and made the full GIS contribution increase needed to lift every senior out of poverty.

Now the government suggests that changes will not affect current seniors or those approaching retirement. The Conservatives have said that those affected will have time to plan. No mention was made of those still paying mortgages, the cost of post-secondary education for their kids, and the real cost of increases to the cost of living.

What Conservatives do not say is that the poorest seniors are the ones who will be affected. The truth is that many low-paying jobs require substantial physical labour. That makes it far more difficult to work past age 65. Unfortunately, I do not expect the government will be sensitive to that reality. The same hard-working Canadians, the ones who rely on the OAS, are for the most part people who have struggled their entire lives. The reason they have not saved is that there is no money to save. As I have already said, every penny was spent on the necessities of life.

The scramble which the Prime Minister incited after his announcement at Davos about the suggested changes that would occur a few years down the road was a calculated tactic to divide future and current seniors. The government is pitting today's young people who are struggling to find work against seniors relieved that their retirement is secure.

We know that young people today are struggling to find work. They are forced to enter into the workforce later in life than their parents and grandparents did. Taking inflation into account, the truth of the situation is that people are earning less now than in the past. Too many young people cannot find work to their full potential and consequently are going to be forced to work longer and retire later than their parents did. Apparently, that will be at age 67. All of this is because the Conservative government wants to build new prisons, give huge tax breaks to profitable corporations and purchase expensive fighter jets.

I have been travelling across the country listening to what seniors have to say. What I have been hearing is that seniors are not buying the government line. They are worried about their children and grandchildren. They want the best for them. They want to make sure they are well looked after and refuse to accept anything less than what they want for themselves.

● (1130)

Seniors are very wise. They know a bait and switch when they see one. They also know that the OAS is an investment, not just for themselves, but for all of our society. Seniors on OAS spend all of their money in their neighbourhoods. That money is reinvested in our economy, in local businesses and in community jobs. OAS is not a burden on the economy. It is an investment. Our seniors make an investment. They are not pulling down our economy.

From a crass monetary perspective, it is significantly cheaper to keep people out of poverty than to deal with the ramifications of poverty, including an increased burden on our medical and judicial systems.

I want to be very clear. The money we invest in OAS is readily available. We have the money to lift seniors out of poverty in the present and to address the additional expenses that the government will face in the future. We have heard from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the money is there now and in the future. We have heard it from the OECD. Right now, it costs about 2.3% of GDP to provide services and pensions for seniors. By 2030, it will be about 3.2% of GDP. Thereafter, it will fall rapidly to 1.4%.

However, instead of investing in Canada and in our social safety net, the Conservatives have chosen to saddle the treasury and Canadians with corporate tax giveaways that do not guarantee a single new job. No one knows better than Londoners, who remember what happened to the Electro-Motive Diesel workers.

Seniors represent one of the fastest-growing populations in Canada today. The number of seniors in Canada is projected to increase from about 4.2 million in 2005 to 9.8 million in 2036. Many more seniors will be retiring in the years to come. Therefore, we need to have a social safety net in place to avoid dramatic increases in the rate of poverty.

Private Members' Business

It is about intelligent, thoughtful planning, which is something that we have not seen from the government. In fact, the Conservatives are clearly making the wrong decisions on how to care for the increased number of seniors by 2036. They have failed the plan and they have fallen short of what is really needed: investment in home care, investment in long-term care, investment in pharmacare and increased access to resources. All of these will save us money in the long run.

We also need appropriate, affordable housing and investment in geriatric studies and in our communities. That is what is important. Tragically, the Conservatives do not seem to know that. They do not know how to be government.

The concerns of the future are very real. Today, only 38.5% of Canadian workers have workplace pensions. Nearly one-third have no retirement savings at all. More than 3.5 million Canadians are not saving enough in RRSPs for what used to be called their "golden years" and 75% of workers are not even participating in a registered pension plan. Clearly, the notion that retirement savings can be adequately accounted for through purchases of RRSPs does not work.

Urgent government action is needed. Pension reform is needed.

It should further be noted that private retirement savings are concentrated in a small percentage of families. According to Statistics Canada, 25% of families hold 84% of those pension assets, while 3 out of 10 families have no private pension at all.

Seniors have worked hard all their lives. They have played by the rules. Now, they simply want access to the programs and services that their hard-earned tax dollars helped to make. One soon-to-be senior told me, "I made the sacrifices. I raised honest, responsible children. Now I want to rest, to retire and to enjoy the contributions I've made to my community. I earned a secure retirement. Please don't allow anyone to steal it from me. I will not be cheated of the retirement that I deserve."

New Democrats will not allow the government to cheat the seniors of the present, nor the seniors of the future. They deserve that security.

● (1135)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to have an opportunity to speak to Motion No. 307 today. I will read it for anyone who may have just tuned in and is not aware of the full context of my colleague's motion.

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize the contributions that the baby boom generation has made in building Canada; (b) affirm its support for the Old Age Security program; (c) commit to maintaining the sixty-five year qualifying age contained in section 3 of the Old Age Security Act; and (d) recognize that Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, a program designed to help low income seniors, are inextricably linked and ensure that they continue to have identical ages of eligibility.

Private Members' Business

My colleague has introduced this motion to again showcase how important age 65 is to all of us as Canadians. It is not something that the government should be looking at easily tinkering with. I also want to thank him for his kind words and for his ongoing support and leadership in protecting OAS, GIS and seniors in general. This member was first elected just over a year ago. He has spent a good portion of that time fighting for seniors and baby boomers in Prince Edward Island and throughout Canada. I wish that the government would show the same kind of sensitivity.

We are going to give it one more chance with another motion that we are hoping will, somehow, somewhere, get to the government's ear. We are asking the government to back off from the move it is making. I think it is reckless. There is absolutely no reason for it. We have found no one who can substantiate the need for it, especially given the fact that the Prime Minister made a commitment.

It is no wonder people are cynical. Politicians make all kinds of commitments that they are not going to change things, such as income trusts and pensions. Then when they get into office, they completely ignore those commitments. I think it is bad for all of us, and politics in general, when that happens.

Today will serve as the government's final warning on the subject. Seniors from all parts of Canada have spoken loudly through myself and all of us as elected officials, including government members. They are demanding that the Conservatives stop trying to balance the budget on the backs of seniors and baby boomers.

Despite a belief that the OAS benefits, such as the basic monthly pension, the guaranteed income supplement and the allowance, were secure and well beyond the opportunistic reach of government, we know these systems are vulnerable to any mean-spirited government. This is exactly what we are about to see on Thursday.

Slashing the OAS has been tried before. Conservative icon Brian Mulroney set his sights on seniors before abandoning the move in the face of overwhelming public pressure. That was his Charlie Brown moment, as it is often referred to. Knowing this, most Canadians were surprised when this Prime Minister, during his January 26 lecture to the World Economic Forum in Davos, signalled that he was considering major transformation to the OAS and GIS. Too bad he did not have the courage to tell people that last April when he reaffirmed his commitment to seeing that they would stay on.

I was very surprised, as many of us were, considering this particular Prime Minister campaigned, saying that Conservatives would not cut the rate of increase to transfers for health care, education and pensions, and that was job number one. Again, it just adds to the cynicism out there. I guess he hopes Canadians are not paying attention as he sticks his hands deep into the pockets of our seniors.

Canadians are paying attention. Earlier today Mr. Kessey wrote to my office. He said:

In my view, the politicians who want benefits to be moved to 67 years should try to vacate their office jobs and assume the duties of hard-working citizens such as construction workers, etc.

I agree with Mr. Kessey. I suspect most of us in the House do. As someone whose household made its living from construction for

more than 40 years, perhaps I could lend the Prime Minister a set of work boots and gloves. I assume he does not have his own. He would find out what it is really like to go out and work in these hard jobs. Once people get to 65, their bodies are clearly paying the price for that. Never mind having to wait until 67.

Initially the government suggested that the OAS system was not economically sustainable when confronted by the economics presented by an aging population.

● (1140)

This is no surprise. We have known for years that we were going to have an aging population and we know the demographics. This is no surprise where the Prime Minister suddenly had a report on his desk to say, "Oh my goodness, we're heading for a disaster". That is not the case at all.

It was further suggested by government that increasing the OAS qualifying age from 65 to 67 would reduce costs in the immediate term, allowing the system to withstand the increasing number of boomers in retirement. The government's already weak argument was then augmented with claims of intergenerational inequity. In the simplest terms possible, let me put it this way. The Conservatives were claiming that the costs of the OAS system would outpace the government's ability to pay and, even if it could afford the projected increases, the increased cost of supporting a growing pension system would be unfair to younger workers. This seems pretty rich given the fact that the Conservatives gave \$6 billion to our large corporations, \$30 billion or \$35 billion is still being bantered around for untended jets and another \$1 billion went for fake lakes and glow sticks. Now the PM is demanding that Canada's lowest-income seniors tighten their belts. Setting aside the fact that the Cons promised not to cut the OAS and ignoring the fact that the Cons have spent money with little regard for prudence, their sustainability argument is nonsense.

Last month, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the OAS is sustainable in the long term, even if enhanced. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was appointed by the Prime Minister not by a Liberal government, in which case the Conservatives would have said there was something wrong with the individual. This Parliamentary Budget Officer was appointed by the Prime Minister himself. He should have faith in his numbers. Instead, he cast them aside and said that his numbers are ridiculous and so is he. The Parliamentary Budget Officer also said the OAS is respectful of the concept of fairness and intergenerational equity. So it would appear as though the Conservatives are proposing to cut seniors' benefits not because they have to but because they want to. It is shameful. Fortunately, Bill C-307, if it passes the House, would help to prevent this from happening.

Private Members' Business

As a reminder of where all these wonderful programs came from, the OAS was first created by Liberal prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King in 1927, because poverty in certain sectors of Canada's seniors' population had become rampant. Again in 1952, another Liberal prime minister, Louis St. Laurent, expanded the program because he felt it was unfair that the provinces were being saddled with the lion's share of the cost of combatting seniors' poverty. In 1967, Liberal prime minister Lester Pearson created the guaranteed income supplement, again to reduce the instances of extreme poverty among our seniors. None of us believe that Canadian seniors should be living in poverty. The Liberal governments have worked for many years to ensure it does not happen. The steps that are about to be taken on Thursday would unravel that and start to put people back into poverty. Rather than being so proud of our Canadians and how we lead the way in so many social programs, we are clearly going backwards.

In 1975, again a Liberal prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, created the spousal benefit, always with the intent that we would not have women and seniors living in poverty. So for 90 years, successive Liberal governments have worked to build and maintain an old age security pension that would ensure seniors could live with dignity; ensure the provinces did not have to deal with these issues alone which is again what we are doing, downloading more and more pressures onto the provinces; and show the world that Canada has a heart. Now I am getting letters from overseas asking what happened to Canada, saying that it has lost its heart and its moral compass on so many issues.

Past Liberals have always understood the need to help vulnerable people to be fiscally responsible. We have always done that. There is no reason whatsoever to do this, other than having a Prime Minister who clearly believes that the government's role is not to help people but to let them fend for themselves. That is not my Canada.

● (1145)

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise to speak to the motion. I understand that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has communicated her request for an amendment to the motion directly to the member for Charlottetown. I am hopeful we can move forward in a spirit of compromise and work toward ensuring the sustainability of the old age security program for future generations. The amendment the government has put forward would change sub-point c to say we “commit to maintaining the sustainability and affordability of the OAS program”.

Generally, we are in agreement with many of the points in the motion. Certainly, we can all agree that the baby boomer generation can be credited for much of the economic growth of our country. I know we are all in support of the old age security system. That is why our government plans to make changes to the OAS to ensure the sustainability of this program for future generations.

The old age security system needs to be changed. It was designed in the 1950s and the world of 2012 is a very different place. It is currently not sustainable. What I do not understand, having paid close attention to the debate on this topic in the public, is why the opposition parties would resist making the necessary changes to keep the OAS system sustainable. We will all retire some day. Do we not want an OAS program on which we can rely? More important,

do we not want OAS to be available for our children and our grandchildren?

The Prime Minister and the Minister of HRSDC have presented the facts on demographic changes to the House many times. These are not new numbers. When it comes to an aging population, no one has been able to refute the statistics, yet the opposition still maintains that the Government of Canada should ignore the reality of an aging population and do nothing to modernize the OAS system.

We believe in ensuring the sustainability of the OAS system, and our amendment reflects that commitment. To put it bluntly, under the current rules, and without changes, OAS costs will triple over the coming decades without similar revenue growth to support that cost. Inaction is not an option, unless we want to force future generations to make much more difficult decisions. We cannot afford to let that happen. We need to act now.

We are dealing with an unprecedented situation. Some time in the next eight years we will reach a population milestone. We will have more senior citizens in the Canadian population than people under the age of 20.

We have talked about the decreasing worker to retiree ratio. If opposition members have some magical way of creating more workers and taxpayers to improve that ratio, I would like to hear about it. However, their previous plans to raise taxes will not work. We have seen the disastrous results in Europe of high taxes and massive deficits. Before anyone says immigration is the answer, I would like to point out that even the most optimistic projections realize that newcomers cannot fill the looming labour shortages in our economy. Besides, many of the countries that could provide us with immigrants are aging themselves, albeit at a slower rate.

This is a worldwide trend and before long there will be critical labour shortages worldwide. With more retired people and fewer taxpayers there is obviously more financial pressure on the social programs, especially retirement income programs. Other industrial countries have reviewed their retirement income programs and made changes to keep them sustainable into the future. In some cases, yes, that meant raising the age of eligibility of a pension.

● (1150)

Canada is more fortunate than some countries in a sense that we have a solid financial footing, which gives us more time to plan and to implement changes. Some other nations have been forced by financial crisis to take action. We have the strong economic leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance to thank for Canada's G7 leading economic performance. Because of our strong economy, we have more fiscal room to manoeuvre. We could introduce changes gradually.

Private Members' Business

As we have said many times, anyone currently collecting OAS will not be affected by these changes in any way. They have nothing to be concerned about and they will not lose a single penny. People who are close to retirement do not have to worry that the rules will change tomorrow.

Change has to come, otherwise Canadians who are in their twenties and thirties now will be at a disadvantage. If we postpone reforms to the OAS, we will simply defer the costs, not eliminate them. Our children and grandchildren will not thank us for saddling them with our debts.

Inscribed on the western arch of the Peace Tower is "Where there is no vision, the people perish". That is taken from Proverbs 29:18. Unless we have a vision for our OAS program, it will not be there.

As parliamentarians, we have to think of our nation's future. We need to look beyond the short-sighted politics that too often stop us from making needed changes to ensure the long-term sustainability of our most cherished programs. What kind of legacy do we want to leave to those who come after us?

We have had a terrible warning from the recent experiences of other countries. Are we going to learn from that warning and change course while we can, or keep going, full steam ahead, into an iceberg? We may feel safe now, but we cannot take anything for granted. Now is the time for prudence and foresight.

Our government is encouraging Canadians to prepare for their retirement well in advance, and we want to help them make those wise financial decisions. We can hardly expect them to do that unless we set a good example of fiscal responsibility ourselves. Canadians should be heartened and reassured to know that their government is looking and acting as a good steward of public funds.

The Canada pension plan is rock solid. The latest actuarial reports indicate it is fully sustainable for the next 75 years. However, the OAS program is facing grave challenges. Without reform, the cost of the program will have tripled by 2030. Where is the \$108 billion going to come from?

Some people say that we will be able to absorb that cost because of increased economic productivity. What kind of economic productivity do they believe we will have given the massive tax burden the economy will be required to absorb just to pay for this program?

Canadians are naturally concerned about their pensions, but no one's interest is served by stirring up emotions and evoking suspicion and fear-mongering. We need to have a rational conversation about reforms to the OAS, without pointing fingers and making wild accusations.

What can we do to ensure that all Canadians can have income security in their retirement? Let us talk about the practicalities. Let us talk about what works and does not work in other countries.

The motion proposed by the hon. member for Charlottetown does recognize the contributions of our seniors and those nearing retirement, with which we agree. However, it also appears to maintain the status quo, which in the long run will not save or protect anything for those seniors and for future generations. It would only

tie our hands and push this problem onto tomorrow's legislators and tomorrow's taxpayers.

We will not follow the opposition's lead in sticking our heads in the sand and pretending we are oblivious to the obvious problems an aging society present to Canada. That is why ask my colleagues in the House to work collaboratively with the government on our amendment to Motion No. 307.

● (1155)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, for Canadians watching today, the New Democrats say that OAS is sustainable. There is no crisis in OAS except the one created by the Conservatives. We have all heard repeatedly in this place of the report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer who confirms what economists and pension experts have said, and that is OAS is easily sustainable. In fact, that report indicated that there was room for growth. Therefore, I will keep repeating the same mantra that OAS is secure and it is affordable.

I have gone to 46 town hall meetings across the country since 2009 and 6 in the last few weeks. Everybody is very fearful because of how this has been delivered by the Conservatives. I want to read a recent review of Canada's retirement income system by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development pension team, which has said:

—Canada does not face major challenges of financial sustainability with its public pension schemes....Long-term projections show that public retirement-income provision is financially sustainable.

Earlier we had people from the government side speaking to the cost. We agree that currently it costs 2.4% of GDP to fund OAS. We also agree that it is going to go to 3.16% of GDP. However, one of the things that is missing in the government's assumptions that we keep hearing about, as it talks about the increase in the number of people, the percentage difference, which is less than 1% of GDP that we certainly believe should be invested in our seniors, is the growth projections for that period of time in GDP. Are we not hearing it because the Conservatives do not believe their policy is going to give us growth in GDP? I doubt very much we would ever hear a comment from them on that at all.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]*

During the May election, New Democrats were very clear on pensions. In fact, the very first platform issue we raised, and the member for London—Fanshawe continually speaks about in this place and I thank her for her work on this file, was addressing seniors' poverty by increasing the guaranteed income supplement. However, the Prime Minister did not even mention changing OAS during that election campaign. One would think that if a party was planning to come in to make such a substantial change, which amounts to off-loading a lot of the costs of the federal government onto the provinces and municipalities, that it would at least tell Canadians. Could it be that the Conservatives did not tell Canadians because they might have lost a couple of votes? From the round tables and town halls I have held, about 30% of the people who come into those rooms are former Conservative supporters, and they are the ones using the word “former”. It is very troubling that a party would make these kinds of changes.

Let us talk about the cost for moment. We would take approximately \$6,000 a year for each of those two years. For example, in the province of Ontario, if a person is on a disability pension that at 65 is expected to transfer to OAS and GIS, that would not happen for two years. The province of Ontario and other provinces would have to carry the burden of that cost for two years. Also in Ontario, for example, for those 60 years old who have lost their jobs because of plant closures, who are not employable and are on social assistance hoping to get on OAS and GIS by the age of 65, it would be two more years the province would have to raise property taxes in order pay for that. Therefore, part of what is happening is the off-loading of many of the costs for the federal government.

When I went from town hall to town hall, people were talking about being very offended that the Prime Minister made pronouncements about retirement security in Davos, a foreign country. I want to be clear that we are not saying the Prime Minister at that time said 65 to 67, but the PMO notes said it to the media and thus the storm started.

- (1200)

Instead of tearing down our cherished programs, we New Democrats have been working hard for three years putting together a retirement security program. We propose phasing in a doubling of CPP, as we have spoken about endlessly in the House for three years, so that generations to come would have a more secure foundation on which to retire. We will eliminate poverty by significantly increasing the GIS.

New Democrats would also create a national pension insurance plan funded by the plan holders. The premiums would be paid by them.

We also want to change legislation, the BIA and CCAA, so that when companies go under, the pension funds and the pensioners will be part of the group that can access resources in the remainder of a company to furnish their pensions going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I must interrupt the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek at this point. He will have four minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT

The House resumed from March 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the chance to participate in the debate on Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act, a bill that would improve the immigration system in Canada in a number of ways.

As the debate has unfolded in the House, I have had the opportunity to hear many differing, yet informed and thoughtful opinions from hon. colleagues on this bill and on the broader issues touching Canada's immigration system. It would be disingenuous of me to claim there is anything approaching unanimous agreement in the House on this issue. As with all legislation we consider here, hon. members make their arguments with conviction and, hopefully, with respect for one another's views. However, in the end, we are still having a debate with more than a single point of view on offer.

That being said, it speaks to the strength of this country that although we may disagree on some of the specific measures in this bill, there is a general consensus among Canada's parliamentarians on the need for a strong, fair and effective immigration system. We should not take this for granted. There are not a lot of other nations in the world where legislators from different parts of the political spectrum, from different corners of the country, from different generations with different personal backgrounds all agree that immigration is a net benefit to the country and vital to our economy, society and national interest.

We are lucky to be living in such a country. We are lucky to be having a respectful debate about how to make our immigration system better rather than having a wrenching, existential dispute about whether to even have immigration at all, as is currently happening in many other countries around the world. That is important to keep in mind as we continue this important debate.

As far as the specific legislation is concerned, I am a strong supporter of Bill C-31. I believe the measures in the bill would bring improvements to an immigration system that we all agree is central to Canada's interests. Many of my hon. colleagues who have already spoken about those measures have done a good job in delineating exactly how they would bring these improvements.

Government Orders

In the spirit of consensus I have alluded to in my remarks so far, I would like to take a bit of time to talk about some of the things this bill upholds, on which I hope all hon. members, no matter where they sit in the House, can agree. I hope that by highlighting these aspects of this bill, I will be putting some of the debate about its measures into a larger perspective.

First, it must be acknowledged that Canada's refugee system is among the most generous in the world. We welcome more refugees per capita than any other G20 country. There is nothing in this bill that would change that fact. Indeed, by helping legitimate refugee claimants get through the claims process faster, it would arguably make the system even more generous. If Bill C-31 passes, Canada's refugee system would continue to be one of the most generous in the world, reflecting the great humanitarian tradition of this country.

In many ways, the operation of our refugee system is also a model for the world. One of the reasons for that is that every eligible asylum claimant is entitled to a full and fair hearing before the refugee protection division at the independent Immigration and Refugee Board. As an independent quasi-judicial body, the IRB decides each claim on a case-by-case basis, on its individual merits. It is worth noting that the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees requires that all refugees receive a fair hearing, but it does not require that claims be decided by an independent quasi-judicial tribunal. We go that extra step in Canada because it is an international best practice.

Also, as an added protection for all claimants, should the IRB reject their claims, they may still apply for judicial review at the Federal Court. These processes help ensure the fairness and integrity of our refugee system and they would continue to do so if Bill C-31 is passed. In fact, most claimants would have access to a new appeals process with the coming introduction of a new independent body, the refugee appeal division, into the refugee system. The refugee appeal division would allow most claimants access to an appeal that included the ability to provide new evidence not reasonably available at the time of the initial claim. The establishment of the RAD is another example of Canada's going above and beyond its international commitments.

• (1205)

I just alluded to Canada's refugee policies being affected not only by the laws we pass in Parliament but also being a reflection of our international obligations. Canada is party to many international agreements and treaties that guide our policies in this area. Bill C-31 upholds them all. For example, all refugee claimants, no matter which country they are from or whether or not they are ultimately found to be deserving of Canada's protection, will have access to our court system. This is part of our obligations under a 1951 UN convention, and it will not change with this legislation.

Another example of an international commitment that will be upheld by Bill C-31 is Canada's core international protection obligation of non-refoulement. Refoulement means the return of persons to situations of persecution, risk of torture, or risk to life. It is prohibited by both the 1951 refugee convention and the 1984 convention against torture. Again, Bill C-31 upholds this international obligation. Indeed, there is nothing in the bill that would affect our international commitments in any way.

The fact is that for a long time Canada's immigration system has been abused by people who do not want to play by the rules and want to jump the queue. Recent waves of bogus refugee asylum claims from the democratic and human-rights-protecting European Union have made it clear that further reforms to Canada's asylum system are needed urgently.

Our government is acting responsibly and in the best interests of Canadian taxpayers by introducing reforms to address the increasing number of bogus refugee claimants. These bogus claimants, many of whom withdraw or abandon their own claims, seek to abuse Canada's generous asylum system and receive generous social benefits like welfare and health care, costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

Bill C-31 would make our immigration system not only faster but also fairer. It would put a stop to bogus refugees abusing our generous immigration system, and at the same time this bill would provide protection more quickly to those who are truly in need. What is more, once Bill C-31 is passed, Canada would continue to have the most generous immigration system in the world, and we would continue not only to meet but also to exceed our domestic and international obligations.

I hope that all hon. members will agree with me on these points. I urge all of my colleagues in this House to support Bill C-31 and ensure its speedy passage.

Finally, in my riding I have a community called Brooks, Alberta, which has at least hundred different nationalities. I have spoken with people there who have either been refugees or have come to Canada as immigrants. They all support Bill C-31. They have had many opportunities to tell me how disappointed they are by some of the issues that have come forward, particularly the attempted queue jumping in our refugee system.

I look for support from all parties on this issue.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague concluded his speech by saying that he is looking for support from all political parties. It is important to note that, during the previous Parliament, all political parties reached an agreement after the Conservatives made a number of amendments to the bill to ensure unanimous support. Because the Conservatives had a minority at the time, refusing to negotiate was not really an option. Now they know that they have a majority, so the first thing they did with the bill before us today was take out all of the changes and amendments that the other parties asked for. And now they want our support.

Government Orders

If the government wants support from all parties, can the member tell us why it is refusing to include the amendments we proposed, which it included before? Why did the government decide to use its majority to get a bill passed without negotiating with the parties?

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the refugee system, there has been a lot of queue jumping. People from countries in the European Union whose rights are protected have put in bogus claims. It has cost us hundreds of millions of dollars.

The reason we need to move forward with this legislation is to ensure the safety of our citizens. We need to ensure we do not have these bogus claims. We also need to ensure that when people come here they are actually refugees and ensure we save millions of dollars with respect to our social programs.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to be clear that no one has been displaced because of refugees in terms of the process of being able to immigrate to Canada. I would ask the member to give us some specific examples of individuals or embassies anywhere in the world who are aware of individuals who have been displaced because of refugees wanting to come to Canada.

However, my question follows up on a previous question. There were issues regarding the safe country list, which will have a profound impact on thousands of people around the world because the minister now believes that he should have the sole authority to designate a country as a safe country. Prior to that, it was the unanimous opinion of the House, and he made reference to the word “unanimous”, that it should be done through an advisory committee advising the minister as to which countries are safe and which are not.

Would the member support a Liberal Party amendment to re-establish that principle that had been previously supported unanimously in the House?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, one of the things the member talked about was being displaced on the refugee list. We had the *Sun Sea* and another ship come to Vancouver carrying illegal immigrants who had paid \$25,000 to come here. That actually is jumping the queue, which does displace other people.

What we are also trying to do is to put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and ensure that Canada's refugee system is strong, vibrant and available to those people who want to come to Canada and are willing to do so without jumping the queue and displacing other people. We welcome those immigrants to Canada because, at one point or another, our families or our grandparents came to Canada to help build this country. We want to help other individuals who have made proper applications to come here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my opposition to a draconian bill that would change the way in which refugees and asylum seekers are treated. I am deeply disappointed in this bill, which revokes most of the compromises that were reached in connection with the former Bill

C-11, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, in addition to reintroducing Bill C-4, which targets refugees instead of human smugglers.

Bill C-11, which was passed by a minority government during the previous Parliament, gave rise to what could be considered historic compromises with a view to making truly balanced refugee reforms. But now, at a time when that bill has not yet even come into effect, the government is doing away with everything the members of this House accomplished together and is instead imposing an ideological approach without giving any thought to the lives of the people who will be affected by this change.

By acting in this way, the Conservative government is going back on what it agreed to and demonstrating once again that it does not believe in co-operation and that what it wants more than anything is to put its own ideology ahead of the well-being of the people affected by its decisions. Bill C-31 transforms a balanced measure into a radical, partisan, ideological measure.

I want to remind the House that the Laval immigration detention centre is in my riding, Alfred-Pellan. There are three such centres in Canada: one in Laval, one in Toronto and one in Vancouver. Refugees who cannot prove their identity are incarcerated in this facility, which looks like a prison and is on federal prison property. There, people are handcuffed to be moved and families are kept apart. The centre tells refugees that it will take only a few days to check their identity, but in reality some of them will spend weeks or even months in a place that is run like a medium-security prison.

The average stay at this centre is currently 28 days, according to the Canada Border Services Agency. Detention leaves its mark on asylum seekers' mental health. After being handcuffed when they are moved, having their personal effects confiscated and being separated from their families, detainees leave the centre with serious health problems and depression.

Research proves this. Janet Cleveland, a researcher and psychologist at the CSSS de la Montagne at McGill University, met with nearly 200 asylum seekers during a study on the impact of detention on the mental health of people seeking asylum in Canada. The study was conducted with four other researchers. Over 120 of the asylum seekers had been in detention for three weeks in either Montreal or Toronto when she met them. The others were not being detained.

All the asylum seekers taking part in the study had already endured traumatic experiences when they arrived in Canada, but those who were placed in detention were more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety or post-traumatic shock. When I asked the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism in February why this government was not doing anything to correct this situation, which is intolerable for the officials and the newcomers, he replied that it is true that there is a waiting list for refugee claimants, and that a new system will ensure a processing period of a few weeks. He said new claims would be heard by the IRB within two to three months. Here is what Janet Cleveland said:

As far as the government is concerned, three weeks in a centre is not very long. Yet when we compare these individuals to others who are not being detained, the detained refugees were twice as likely to show serious post-traumatic stress symptoms. We did not expect this result after “only” three weeks of detention.

Government Orders

I would point out that 40% of the immigrants being detained in Laval are there simply while their criminal record are being checked. So, I would ask the minister once again: why are these newcomers being treated like criminals? I am also very worried about the rights of refugees, and of the people who work in these centres, and the way this will be implemented. What worries me even more is the fate of child refugees who are separated from their families and loved ones when they arrive here, and therefore lose their sense of security.

• (1220)

Unlike Bill C-4, Bill C-31 includes an exemption from detention for anyone under the age of 16. That is very good, but when I asked the Minister of Public Safety whether those children would be separated from their families and what would happen to the families, he did not even answer my question. That leads me to believe that, as a result of this bill, children will be separated from their families, which can cause serious psychological problems and trauma for children who are only 16 or younger.

It also makes me think about the measures the minister intends to implement to guarantee that minors will not be detained based on their age when their own identity and age are in the process of being verified. If they do not have documents to prove that they are under the age of 16, what assurance do we have that they will not be detained? For example, will a 14 or 15 year old who looks 16 or older be treated fairly? It is truly quite disturbing.

Since men are detained separately from women and children, what will happen when a single father arrives with his children? Will they be separated immediately upon their arrival?

We must rethink how we treat our brothers and sisters who are seeking asylum. To do so, we must first acknowledge the human nature of their journey, which is fraught with injustice, tragedy and trauma. In my opinion, the amendments proposed by Bill C-31 will result in the criminalization of people who are often victims and have reached the end of their rope.

Is it right to treat them like criminals when they arrive? Is it one of our values to separate and break up families, when their family ties are all they have left?

I recognize the importance of properly identifying refugee claimants. However, I am convinced that it can be done in a more humane way, without compromising the psychological and social well-being of asylum seekers, without breaking up families, without passing this bill which would welcome refugees with detention when they arrive.

I would like to quote a letter from Human Rights Watch dated March 16, 2012, addressed to the members of this House.

HRW believes that the detention provisions of Bill C-31 unduly and inappropriately impose penalties on vulnerable migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Instead of identifying and punishing human smugglers, these provisions of the bill would punish irregular migrants, including refugee men, women and children fleeing indiscriminate violence and/or persecution. These people should not be punished on the sole basis of their "irregular" entry.

This letter is signed by Bill Frelick, refugee program director, and Jasmine Herlt, director, Human Rights Watch Canada.

Bill C-31 is bad for refugees and does absolutely nothing to target smugglers. In my opinion, the previous Bill C-11, as amended in the

last legislature, takes a more balanced approach, and deserves to be implemented and fairly evaluated. The government constantly talks about the importance of taking action. Here we have a bill, Bill C-11, which is ready to go and I invite the government to move on it.

Canadians and the international community are speaking out against Bill C-31. I am asking the government to reconsider its approach. We have to think of the families that have already lived through so much trauma and are just looking for a place where they can be protected. This bill does not target the right people at all. We absolutely have to rethink this approach. Canada has always welcomed refugees and must continue to do so.

I would also like my colleagues to consider the amendment proposed by the member for Vancouver Kingsway, and I would ask all members of the House to support it.

• (1225)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her speech. She said that Canadians are against Bill C-31, but is she aware that after illegal migrants arrived 18 months ago, polls clearly showed that approximately two-thirds of Canadians believed that the government should prevent boats transporting illegal migrants and human smugglers from entering Canadian territory?

Is she aware that the majority of Canadians—about 55%—say that illegal migrants who arrive via illegal means but who are recognized as refugees under our laws should immediately be deported to their country of origin?

This means that Bill C-31 is much more generous than public opinion and more mindful of our tradition of welcoming true refugees.

Is she aware that Quebeckers expressed this opinion more strongly than other Canadians? In other words, her constituents want to turn away ships transporting illegal migrants. Is she aware of that?

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his excellent question.

I believe he is confusing immigrants and refugees. When people arrive here illegally because they are being persecuted in their country of origin, they are protected under international law. Such people are considered refugees and we are supposed to welcome them under the international treaties to which Canada is a signatory.

Honestly, I would like to know what the hon. member opposite who just asked the question would have done with the boat people from Vietnam when they arrived. Should they have been considered illegal immigrants or refugees? Those people were welcomed here. Why would we not continue to do the same thing?

Government Orders

• (1230)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the point the minister raised. It is somewhat discouraging that he wants to portray refugees in a negative fashion. We saw a sample of that when he made reference to illegal immigrants. These are in fact refugees.

Hon. Jason Kenney: How do you know that?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux : Mr. Speaker, the minister asks how I know they are. I have more faith in the system obviously than he does. I wonder if he, as the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, would have that same attitude if they were boat people from Vietnam, or individuals from the Jewish community on the *St. Louis*.

With respect to the individuals to whom the minister is referring, I wonder if the member sees the value of recognizing them as refugees as opposed to immigrants.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his excellent question.

As I just mentioned, there is a demagogic problem here with the words being used in this debate right now, with the terms “illegal immigrants”, “real immigrants”, “criminals”, “refugees”. We are talking about protecting refugees. We were talking about dealing with human smugglers, but that is not at all what is happening. In fact, refugees are being attacked. This is real Conservative demagoguery.

I would invite the minister across the way to come visit the immigration detention centre in Laval and come see the people who are being detained there. What is he going to do for those people? Where is he going to place the young people who are already there? Is he going to separate them from their families? Will he send them elsewhere?

These centres are quite far from the hubs where the young people would be placed. What is the government going to do with the families? Will the families continue to be separated in this way? Will the detention centres be expanded? What is going to happen with this bill?

Unfortunately, many questions remain unanswered.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to rise in support of Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act.

Canada has an international reputation for having the most generous immigration system in the world. We welcome 1 in 10 of the world's resettled refugees, and the number is increasing as our government is welcoming an additional 2,500, or 20%, of the number of resettled refugees to Canada.

Canadians are rightfully proud of our tradition as a compassionate nation. It is a responsibility we take very seriously. Throughout this country I have met and worked with many Canadians. We are a generous people and a generous nation. However, for too many years

we have had to tolerate those who find loopholes or who are deliberately abusing our generosity and taking unfair advantage of our country.

That is why Canadians have become concerned with the growing number of bogus claims and queue jumpers. These bogus claimants bog down the system and, as a result, genuine claimants who are in need of Canada's protection are left far behind and must endure long wait lists.

Fortunately, our Conservative government is taking action to crack down on this abuse and to strengthen the integrity and credibility of our immigration system. Bill C-31 will ensure that those who are in need of Canada's protection will receive it more quickly, while those who are abusing our system will be removed from Canada sooner.

Today I am going to focus my remarks on the provisions in this legislation that deal specifically with human smuggling.

Canada is working hard both at home and abroad to deter and prevent human smuggling. In 2010, Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed a special adviser on human smuggling and illegal migration, who—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would remind all hon. members that they ought not to refer to their colleagues by their given names. The hon. member for Vancouver South.

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, in 2010, the Prime Minister appointed a special adviser on human smuggling and illegal migration to work with governments in source and transit countries as well as with international partners to promote co-operation to combat human smuggling. Canada has also worked hard to partner with local authorities in transit countries to combat human smuggling operations.

While these efforts abroad are important, despite our best efforts, human smuggling operations have continued to target Canada's generous immigration system. Canada must therefore send a clear and categorical message to those who plan to take advantage of us that human smuggling is a deplorable crime and will not be tolerated in Canada. Our Conservative government has been absolutely clear that any attempts to abuse Canada's generosity for financial gain will not be tolerated.

Bill C-31 sends the message that our doors are open to those who play by the rules, including all legitimate refugees, but we will crack down on those who endanger human lives and threaten the integrity of our borders.

Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to prevent the abuse of our generous immigration system. With Bill C-31, we are acting on that mandate.

Canada is a compassionate nation of immigrants with a proud history and tradition of welcoming refugees. At the same time, every sovereign country has a responsibility to protect its citizens and its borders.

Government Orders

With Bill C-31 our government is cracking down on human smugglers with a number of new measures. For example, Bill C-31 will make it easier to prosecute human smugglers and will introduce mandatory minimum sentences for convicted human smugglers. The bill will also target those ship owners and operators who will be liable for the use of their ships in human smuggling.

Experience has shown that cracking down on human smugglers alone is not an effective solution. Action must be taken to address the countless individuals who choose to be smuggled and who choose to pay organized crime large sums of money, sometimes up to \$50,000 per person.

It falls on our government to protect Canadians. This is why Bill C-31 includes the mandatory detention of those who arrive as part of a human smuggling operation. Let us be clear that when they arrive we do not know who they are or what their purposes are. It takes some time to determine this.

That said, it is important to note that Bill C-31 includes one very important change from previous Bill C-4. The current legislation includes an exemption from automatic detention for minors under the age of 16. In addition, adults, people who are 16 years and older, will be released from detention as soon as they receive a positive opinion on their refugee claim from the independent Immigration and Refugee Board. Most bona fide claimants will get protected status and will be released from detention within a matter of months.

As previously stated, this provision is necessary as it protects Canadians. It would be irresponsible to release those involved in a criminal human smuggling operation before their identity or their purpose is established and officials have had time to determine whether or not they pose a risk to the safety and security of Canadians.

Only those asylum claimants whose identities cannot be established, who are a security risk to Canada or who are suspected architects of criminal activity can be held longer under the bill, and for good reason.

I am disappointed that the opposition NDP and Liberals believe that those who arrive on our shores should be released onto our streets and into our communities before we know who these people are and what their purposes are for being here, if they are criminals or terrorists, and whether or not they pose a threat. This is simply irresponsible.

It is also important to note that most other western democratic countries have had these detention provisions for some time and have had even more harsher detention provisions than what is before us today. In fact, other countries detain all asylum claimants. Compared to most other western democratic countries, Canada's detention provisions will continue to be used sparingly.

Bill C-31 will also prevent illegal migrants who are part of a smuggling operation from obtaining permanent resident status or bringing their family members to Canada for a period of five years. This legislation will ensure that taxpayer-funded medical benefits received by illegal migrants are not more generous than those received by the average Canadian. These measures are fair, necessary and will protect Canadians.

● (1235)

It is unfortunate that the NDP and the Liberals oppose our government's efforts to crack down on this despicable crime.

Benjamin Perrin, a law professor at the University of British Columbia, had this to say about them:

Maritime migrant smuggling is the deadliest form of illegal international travel and its illicit proceeds fuel criminality. Canada is an attractive destination for migrant smugglers and these new measures send a strong message that our country is no longer open for business to these criminals.

It is shocking to hear apologists for migrant smugglers portraying these criminals as providing a 'service' for illegal migrants seeking to enter Canada. Migrant smugglers have been linked to organized crime, human trafficking and terrorist organizations. They care nothing for the well-being of those they transport in perilous and often deadly vessels.

Genuine refugees are better served through the use of safe, legal channels such as group processing of refugees through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in programs that Canada has participated in with success.

Michael Deakin-Macey, the past president of the board of directors of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, has also praised the human smuggling measures included in Bill C-31. He said:

Canada is a generous country, with an immigration system that treats both immigrants and refugees very well, however, there are those who are not willing to wait their turn in line and criminals who would profit from this. Instead, they want to jump the immigration queue and make their way to Canada through any means available to them, often bypassing several hospitable countries and travelling halfway around the world to land on our shores.

As a result of this human smuggling, honest and legal would-be immigrants who are waiting patiently and anxiously in the queue are penalized while these smuggled refugees' claims are processed.

To all reasonable observers, the criminal enterprise of this human smuggling is an abuse of both Canada's generosity and the honesty of all the other immigration applicants.

We are pleased that the Government has sent a clear message that it will not be tolerated, and we welcome the introduction of legislation preventing human smugglers from in effect creating an unfair two-tier immigration system, one for the impatient rich and the other for the honest applicant.

Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, would halt an illegal, second tier immigration system and make our immigration system faster and fairer. It would stop human smugglers, foreign criminals and bogus refugee claimants from abusing our generous immigration system and receiving lucrative taxpayer funded health and social benefits.

Bill C-31 would strengthen the integrity of Canada's immigration system and protect our country, our citizens and our communities. This is an important bill and a desirable goal that all members of the House should support.

● (1240)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must say how shocked I am to hear the misinformation that is coming from the government side, first from the member and, prior to that, from the Minister of Immigration who has referred to people who come to our shores by boat as illegal. That is false. International law recognizes that refugees can land at another country's border without a visa if they are escaping persecution. That is an absolute normative and legal way for a refugee to arrive on shores.

Government Orders

They are talking about jumping queues. There is no queue jumping when a refugee lands on the shore of another country. When the Jews escaped Nazi Germany, stealing away to Switzerland in the middle of the night, they were not jumping any queue. They were not applying for any visa.

The member said that the only people who would be locked up would be those engaged in criminal activity. I wonder if the member has read the bill? The bill mandates the government to lock up every person who is designated an illegal or an irregular entrant, including children 16 years of age, or separating families.

I wonder if the hon. member could explain to the Vietnamese community in Vancouver, all of whom escaped Vietnam in boats and most of whom paid someone to do it, why her government would call those people criminals, human smugglers and queue jumpers. What does she say to the Vietnamese community in the Lower Mainland in Canada who used those exact methods and who are being so tarred by this legislation?

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, I am shocked and appalled that the member opposite would say that Canada should be opening its doors and borders to anyone who happens to arrive on a boat. That is precisely what he just said.

We know in this day and age of national security risks and the different events that have happened worldwide, even in Canada, there are risks inherent in people arriving on our shores illegally without any documentation or sense of purpose. I think it is entirely reasonable that Bill C-31 would detain people until those things can be clarified.

I would urge the member opposite to support our communities and protect Canadians and our country by supporting the bill.

• (1245)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have one simple question for the hon. member. She and others on the other side have said that refugee claimants are queue jumpers. I am not sure I understand. It is my understanding that someone who arrives and is accepted as a refugee does not make it more difficult for a regular stream immigration applicant. I thought the two systems were completely separate so that one does not cross over into the other.

Is the hon. member saying that every time the IRB accepts a refugee in Canada, a sponsored, regular stream immigration applicant is refused?

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, who has been a member for a lot longer than I, ought to know that Canada has a generous and welcoming immigration system and refugee accepting system on many different levels: one, as a United Nations designated refugee from camps abroad and elsewhere; and, two, as a group sponsored refugee where churches and various groups can get together to sponsor people they are aware of in specific cases.

The member is trying to mix apples and oranges by saying that people who arrive on our shores, often without documentation, without any sense of who they are, should be put under the government's categories where we know that people are genuine refugees.

In addition, the member opposite should recognize and acknowledge that it takes a while to get in front of the Immigration and Refugee Board, in some cases a number of months, and that, until such time, we do not know who these people are nor their purpose for being in Canada. The bill would ensure the safety of our communities and the safety of our citizens and it would ensure we have some time to determine who they are and their purpose for being in Canada.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about the changes being considered in Bill C-31 to the humanitarian and compassionate provisions of our refugee laws. It also concerns me that changes will be made to the designated country of origin provisions.

I would like to register my concern with the provision that suggests that the Canadian state will take the children of refugees from their families and take care of them.

We have heard a lot from the other side about the generosity of our refugee and immigration system but this was not always the case in Canada. I will talk a bit about that history in order to inform members of how that law developed and how that generosity developed.

I will now talk about the state taking children away from their families. Not long ago, in 2008, the government apologized to the first nations people because, in the past century, first nations children were separated from their parents and their culture in an attempt to force assimilation with the government complicit in the destruction of an entire generation. The repercussions of those decisions are still being felt. Its waves ripple out into society and are felt deeply. The misery of an entire generation carries a heavy burden upon the next and for many other generations to follow.

The government also apologized for the Chinese head tax, an amazing sum of money the Chinese people had to pay to come to our great country in a calculated bid to keep Chinese people from coming to our shores. When the act of 1885 did not work in the bid to keep Chinese people out, the government, in 1923, imposed the Chinese Immigration Act, known in the Chinese Canadian community as the Chinese exclusion act. The government only repealed that act 24 years later in 1947.

When we look at all the contributions that the Chinese Canadian community has made and how integral it is to our Canadian fabric, we need to scratch our heads in wonder about the discrimination and fear of our forefathers. It is clear that our predecessors, both the Liberals and the Conservatives, who sat in this chamber were wrong at that time. In his great wisdom, Mackenzie King ensured that the act was enforced on Dominion Day. The Chinese Canadian community at the time referred to that day as humiliation day. It is hardly something to be proud of.

When we think of that decision and the great length to which Canada actively discriminated against people of Chinese origin, we know now, with the distance of time, that we were wrong. In 2006, the Prime Minister apologized for that wrong.

Government Orders

Something else from the Mackenzie King-R.B. Bennett era that I would like to talk about today shows that we as legislators sometimes make bad judgments. It relates somewhat to the DCO provisions in Bill C-31.

During the second world war, only 5,000 people of the Jewish faith were admitted to Canada. Between 1930 and 1934, during the period of Bennett and King, nearly 17,000 immigrants were deported for having become a public charge, which was the term of the day. People were deported for union activities or membership in the Communist Party. By 1935, 20,000 people were deported. Some people were deported for something as minor as vagrancy. That is the dark history of previous legislators that we have in this chamber.

During the Great Depression, it was easier for a government to blame the other, to direct discrimination and hatred toward those who spoke too loud, said unpopular things, believed in the wrong God or in no God at all, and people with the wrong colour of skin or people who spoke different languages. It was the failure of Canada to take in the Jewish people after seeing the horror of the death camps that led to the foundations of our current refugee policy.

• (1250)

It was seeing the folly that we had made in the earlier part of the 20th century and our lack of compassion for the other that led us to liberalize, open up our refugee policy and be more accepting of refugees. We are so often wrong when it comes to judging the other and our history here is clear.

During the difficult period of the depression in the 1930s and during the period of World War II, anti-Semitism was rife all over the world. It was rife in Canada as well. During the 1930s, people did not believe that things in Germany were so bad. Germany's economy was being well managed by a capable leader who sometimes seemed intolerant and scary, but he essentially managed the country like a clock. However, we stood in horror when we saw that regime also killed people like clockwork in a systematized manner. It killed six million people. This accumulated discrimination, this rhetoric of discrimination that happened during hard economic times was turned into a killing machine with the state killing people.

Anti-Semitism was rife, but Canada only took 5,000 of those people who were being persecuted at that time. Anti-Semitism was rife then and it still lives today, as does Islamophobia. When I heard the Prime Minister say on national television that the greatest threat to our nation was Islamism, it gave me pause. As someone who firmly believes that history shows us where we have strayed so that we can do better in the present, forgive me for saying that I fear a government when it points the finger at the other and criminalizes the other, especially during economic hard times.

Would Oskar Schindler have been considered a human smuggler? How would the passport forgers of Europe have been considered during the Great War if this legislation had been in place? For the people who illegally made passports for Jewish people to get out of their country, how would they be considered? Would they be considered criminals? We have to ask these questions.

When I hear members opposite talk about people not going through proper channels and jumping the queue, it disturbs me. These are divisive politics so dangerous to the Canadian fabric. It

foments fear of the other. They are the reactionary actions of a reactionary government. Let us think upon the dark history that I mentioned, and I have only touched on a couple of points.

I am very proud of my country and I do not want to be misinterpreted. I am a proud Canadian and proud of our great history, but I am also cognizant that we do have darker elements to our history. We have to think about the decisions, the rhetoric and terms that we use for other people coming to our shores. A person fleeing persecution being called a queue jumper disturbs me. We have to think of the dark history and of the decisions being made in this chamber. Let us think about that and ask this question. Who will apologize for the actions of the current government? Of the future legislators who sit in this chamber, who will have to stand to apologize to the victims of this present policy?

• (1255)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that speech was absolutely ridiculous. The bill before us now, which amends the Immigration Act, would exceed Canada's obligations under the UN convention on refugees and the charter of rights. All asylum claimants, regardless from which country they came or the manner of their arrival, would have a full and fair hearing on the merits of their claims at the Immigration and Refugee Board. To in any way compare this to the refusal of Canada to allow, for example, the *St. Louis* to enter territorial waters or the "None is too many" policy of the Mackenzie King government, is outrageous and demagogic.

I understand the demagogic tradition of the hon. member. On May 26 of last year he attended a rally in Montreal, organized by No One Is Illegal and Solidarité sans frontières. This is an organization that opposes any restrictions on immigration. It believes there should be no limits of any kind on immigration to Canada, including for foreign criminals. It is opposed to the deportation of anyone, not only manifestly unfounded and rejected asylum claimants, but even dangerous foreign criminals and terrorists.

By the way, the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway attended a rally for this organization, No One Is Illegal, last week in Vancouver. The head of that organization, who organized the rally attended by those two members, has explicitly endorsed the violent, anarchist tactics of the Black Bloc.

Is that really the policy of the NDP, an anarchist policy that opposes the removal of even dangerous foreign criminals?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, now I am being smeared as an anarchist, even though I sit in this chamber.

My belief is that even if we make the mistake on one person, that person goes back and gets tortured and persecuted. If the person loses his or her life due to the intolerance and the decisions of the government, if any child gets separated from his or her family, is taken care of by the Canadian state and gets psychologically damaged in any way, then the government is responsible.

Government Orders

This is what I am saying. If we make a mistake with even one person due to the intolerance of the government and this legislation, then we will have failed and will have to apologize in the future for those actions.

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the issue of the safe countries list. It is an issue that has been dealt with in previous sessions of the House of Commons.

When there was a minority situation, the government unanimously, through the House, passed legislation that in essence deemed that a country would be added to the safe countries list on the basis of a recommendation coming from an advisory committee made up of professionals who could develop what safe country would be added to the list. This current legislation now gets rid of that recommendation, a recommendation that was unanimously supported by the House of Commons just a couple of years back.

Could the hon. member provide comment as to why he believes it is an important amendment to this current legislation to ensure the advisory board is reinstated?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across mentioned demagoguery.

The NDP believes it is better to have experts and evidence backing up policy. To have a panel of experts who would develop the designated countries list is much better than having the demagoguery of one immigration minister and his cronies saying which countries are safe and which are not.

I would trust experts and evidence much more than the political whims of a certain minister during a certain day.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmī (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, who reminded us of some of the darkest moments of human history and the plight of Jewish deportees.

I wonder if he could comment on any similarities that may exist with the plight of the Roma from the Czech Republic and Romania, for instance, two countries that this government considers safe.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I lived in Turkey for five years, where the Roma people live in much worse conditions than the general population. From what I understand, the conditions are even worse in eastern European countries. We need to remember that the Roma live in difficult circumstances even if they live in a democracy with a relatively strong economy and a responsible government. In many such countries, there are populations, like the Roma, who are persecuted in a more clandestine manner.

[*English*]

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells to participate in the debate on Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act.

Our Conservative government recognizes the importance of immigration to our great country. That is evident in our actions and policies. Since 2006, the Government of Canada has welcomed

the highest sustained level of immigration in Canadian history. Our government has also continued to strengthen and support our generous refugee system, which is an important expression of the compassionate and humanitarian convictions of Canadians and of our international commitments.

Canada remains one of the top countries in the world to welcome refugees. In fact, we welcome more refugees per capita than any other G20 country, because this government understands the importance of the immigration system to Canada's future. It also understands the importance of remaining vigilant about keeping that system functioning in our national interest. To do so, we must always be prepared to make improvements to the system according to changing circumstances and identified shortcomings.

Bill C-31 would do exactly that. When there is a system in place as generous as Canada, it is particularly important to guard against the abuse of that system and that generosity. Indeed, for too many years our refugee system has been abused by too many people making bogus claims. Our system has become overwhelmed by a significant backlog of cases. More recently, we have grown more and more concerned about a notable upsurge of refugee claims originating in countries that we would not normally expect to produce refugees. This is adding to our backlog.

Allow me to specify exactly what I mean by that.

It comes as a surprise to many Canadians to learn that Canada receives more asylum claims from countries in Europe than others in Africa or Asia. Last year alone, almost one quarter of all refugee claims made in Canada were made by EU nationals. Let us think about that. EU countries have strong human rights and democratic systems similar to our own, yet they produced almost 25% of all the refugee claims to this country in 2011. That is up from 14% in the previous year.

These bogus claimants come with a large price tag for Canadian taxpayers. In recent years, virtually all EU claims were withdrawn, abandoned or rejected. The unfounded claims from the 5,800 EU nationals who sought asylum last year cost Canadian taxpayers \$170 million. Under the current system, it takes an average of 4.5 years from an initial claim to remove a failed refugee claimant from the country. Some cases have even taken more than 10 years. The result is an overburdened system and a waste of taxpayer money. For too long, we have spent precious time and taxpayer money on people who are not in need of protection at the expense of legitimate asylum seekers.

The protecting Canada's immigration system act would help speed up the refugee claims process in a number of ways, such as changing the designated country of origin policy to enable the government to respond more quickly to increases in refugee claims from countries that generally did not produce refugees, such as most of those in the European Union. Claimants from those countries would be processed in about 45 days, compared to more than 1,000 days under the current system. Claimants from designated countries of origin would also have their claims heard sooner and would not have access to the new refugee appeal division.

Government Orders

•(1305)

Moreover, it would also further streamline the process by limiting access to appeals for other countries, such as by claimants with manifestly unfounded claims or claims with no credible basis at all. It would enable more timely removals from Canada of failed refugee claimants.

Taken together, these measures send a clear message to those who seek to abuse Canada's generous refugee system. It tells them that if they do not need our protection, they will be sent home quickly. They would not be able to remain in Canada by using endless appeals to delay their removal. At the same time, if they need refugee status, these measures would help them get protection even faster. Every eligible asylum claimant would continue to get a fair hearing at the Immigration and Refugee Board.

Once these needed changes are implemented, Canada's refugee determination system would remain one of the most generous in the world.

The protecting Canada's immigration system act would also deal with the despicable crime of human smuggling. Human smugglers are criminals who operate around the world, charging large amounts of money to facilitate illegal migration. Each year, countless people die while taking these dangerous journeys. Bill C-31 would help crack down on these smugglers in a number of ways. It would enable the Minister of Public Safety to designate the arrival of a group of individuals into Canada as an irregular arrival. It would establish mandatory detention of those individuals to determine their identity, admissibility and whether they have been involved in illegal activities. It is important to mention here that once a person's refugee claim has been approved, that person would be released from detention.

It would also make it easier to prosecute human smugglers and would impose mandatory minimum prison sentences on those convicted of human smuggling. It would hold shipowners and operators to account when their ships are used for human smuggling.

It would enhance our ability to revoke the refugee status of people who are no longer in need of Canada's protection and of those who have gained that status through misrepresentation. It would reduce the attraction of coming to Canada by way of illegal human smuggling, by limiting the ability of those who do to take advantage of our generous immigration system and social services.

One notable improvement in Bill C-31 from Bill C-4 is that mandatory detention would exclude designated foreign nationals who are under the age of 16.

Our government continues to be absolutely clear that human smuggling is a despicable crime and any attempts to abuse Canada's generosity for financial gain will not be tolerated. With this bill, we will crack down on those who endanger human lives and threaten the integrity of our borders.

The protecting Canada's immigration system act also includes a framework for the collection of biometric information, photographs and fingerprints, in the temporary visa program and will establish parameters for how this information can be used and disclosed by the RCMP in order to enforce Canadian law. The use of biometrics

would bring Canada in line with other countries that already use biometrics in their immigration programs, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the European Union, New Zealand, the United States and Japan, among others.

To maintain the support of Canadians for our generous immigration and refugee system, we must demonstrate that Canada has a fair, well-managed system that does not tolerate queue jumping. Bill C-31 will ensure that genuine refugees in need of protection will receive it sooner, while those who are abusing Canada's generosity will be removed more quickly.

I am proud to support this important piece of legislation and hope that all of my colleagues will work together to ensure the timely passage of this bill.

•(1310)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister said that the government has learned the lessons of history, such as Canada's shameful refusal to offer refuge to Jews on the *St. Louis*.

This is what the minister's bill would say about the German Jews aboard the SS *St. Louis* if it were to happen today: "The SS *St. Louis* is piloted by human smugglers intent on abusing Canada's immigration system. The passengers are part of a human smuggling event and will automatically be detained for one year. If their refugee claims are rejected, they will be deported back to Germany with no chance to appeal the negative decision to the RAD. If their refugee claims are accepted, they may or may not be released before the year has passed. Even if their claims are accepted, these German Jews will not be able to sponsor their family members for five years, nor will they be able to apply for permanent residency".

Five years later would be 1943 and too late for those people to sponsor their family members, because it was 1938 when they came. That is what would have been said if the *St. Louis* had come to our shores and this bill had been in place.

I would like the government to justify to the Jewish community of this country why it would bring in a bill that would fail to learn the lessons of history and fail to protect refugees in this country.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the hon. member that Bill C-31 is an important step to better protect our immigration system. It is important that we close the immigration back door so that the system becomes fairer for everyone involved. That is what this proposed legislation attempts to do.

The member mentioned that Jews do not support this bill, but I think that Jews all over Canada support the legislation wholeheartedly.

What I would like to make clear is that our government appreciates the fact that our country was built by immigrants. That is why we have introduced a number of other measures to help newcomers who come to Canada and to better protect Canada's immigration system.

Government Orders

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the member's comments she made reference to a change. There was a change from Bill C-4 to Bill C-31, wherein the government responded to opposition concerns in agreeing that it would be inappropriate to lock up or detain eight-year olds. It is now saying that it would not detain someone under the age of 16. We see that as a positive change.

There are a lot of positive changes that we still need to see in order ultimately to accept a bill of this nature in any fashion.

Having said that, my question to the member is what would happen in the case of a parent with a child. For example, if there were an eight-year old boy with his mother, would the mother be allowed to remain with her child or would she be held in detention?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, again I would tell the member that Bill C-31 proposes very important reforms for asylum seekers to make the process faster and fairer. It includes measures to address human smuggling and provides authority to make it mandatory to provide biometric data with a temporary resident visa application.

Let us be clear: we all want a compassionate immigration system. We all want to help others who generally need Canada's assistance, but we should not and cannot tolerate those who abuse our generosity.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on the matter of Bill C-31 and its prospective immigration reform. Regrettably, rather than being the transformational reform the minister envisages, though some of his reforms have been commendable, this bill, not unlike its earlier incarnation that experts characterized as being "littered with charter violations", is seriously flawed from a constitutional perspective in its constitutionally suspect provisions; from an international perspective in its breaching of our international obligations; from a humanitarian perspective its turning its back on our humanitarian ethos; and from a policy perspective in its granting to ministers of broad, arbitrary, and sometimes non-reviewable powers, while removing avenues of appeal and review for applicants. In particular, this legislation reflects a serious lack of appreciation of what it means to be a refugee escaping persecution, and it can amount to gratuitous punishment of those seeking our protection.

Let me identify some of the defects in this legislation.

First, Bill C-31 would impose unrealistic and unfair deadlines on refugee claimants that would force them to make representations, perhaps at the moment they are most vulnerable, for example having just experienced violence, torture or sexual assault, and then finding themselves in a new country in an unfamiliar situation, not to mention a situation where a language barrier may likely exist, and where a failure to meet deadlines may pre-emptively disqualify their claim without affording them a fair and reasonable opportunity to establish such a refugee claim. For example, the 15-day window for refugee claimants to deliver a written version of the basis of their refugee claim is simply not enough time for refugees to seek legal advice and to do all that is necessary for the preparation of such claims. This includes responding to complicated legal requirements, gathering the evidence to prove their claim and making the legal case. Moreover, the 15-day window to complete an appeal

application is equally unfair and limits the possibility of their pursuing such an appeal, such that mistakes that may be made by the Immigration and Refugee Board may go uncorrected. This legislation would serve in some respects, however inadvertent it may be, to have as its effect the double victimization of those who have been initially victimized by the smugglers exploiting them, and who then end up being victimized when they seek protection on our shores.

This brings me to the second point. The revised process for designating certain countries as safe eliminates an expert independent advisory body that could guard against countries being designated on the basis of erroneous political, economic or other considerations. Individuals from those countries under this legislation would face discriminatory treatment respecting matters as fundamental as access to justice, given that the processing of their claims would occur more slowly than for those from non-designated countries. Not only may this violate UN convention rights, but it also goes against the very premise that all are entitled to equal and impartial hearings regardless of the country of origin. Moreover, the way countries are designated, by a calculation of the number of rejected applicants, we may end up with a situation where a few bad apples can spoil the bunch. Therefore, while there may be numerous false claims from a country, why should we penalize all from that country where there may indeed be bona fide applicants in dire need of protection? Moreover, claimants from these countries would also face immediate removal without a right of appeal, thereby increasing the possibility that those facing a legitimate fear of prosecution would be deported. This flies in the face of our constitutional obligations, as confirmed by the Supreme Court, that we simply cannot deport people to situations of torture or terror.

Third, the bill calls for the mandatory non-reviewable and year-long detention of designated foreign nationals 16 years of age or over, which itself is an arguable breach of both our charter rights and related Supreme Court jurisprudence, which hold that such detentions without review are patently illegal. In the government's rush to incarcerate, a phenomenon that we also saw with Bill C-10, it ignores that there are suffering humans involved who may be in legitimate need of serious protection.

• (1320)

At the end of the day, what this would do is simply immunize error in our refugee system while prejudicing the rights of prospective asylum seekers.

Moreover, the minister himself has acknowledged that there are flaws in this proposal, noting in this place:

We will be moving an amendment to Bill C-31 to allow minors under the age 16 who are not accompanied by their parents to be released from detention if they have been smuggled into the country.

While I appreciate the minister's response in that regard, and I appreciate his presence here and engagement in this debate, it is yet again this rush to legislate without considering all the variables that results in flaws that end up having to be addressed and redressed.

Government Orders

Further, those who are granted refugee status would nonetheless be denied the right to apply for permanent residency for a period of five years. During this period, refugees would be prohibited from applying to reunite in Canada with spouses and their children. In effect, this means that actual reunification could be delayed for approximately six to eight years after being granted refugee status. They would be required to report regularly to immigration authorities for questioning and to produce documents. They would be prohibited from travelling outside Canada for any reason during the period. Arguably again this is in breach of our international human rights and humanitarian obligations in this regard.

As a final note on this point, let us not forget that there are extensive costs associated with the detention of refugees, not simply in terms of their physical detention which is costly on its own, but costs to the system later on in terms of mental health issues resulting from prolonged detention which history suggests could also be a significant burden. This is an issue that was not properly addressed in Bill C-10 and which we are going to be revisiting here in this legislation.

Fourth, this bill targets the permanent residence status of refugees by providing that their status may be revoked if the minister determines that they are no longer in need of protection. This provision could be applied against refugees who make claims in Canada or those who have been resettled to Canada from refugee camps abroad. It could even apply retroactively. As such, refugees who have been living in Canada for even decades and have established lives, families and careers here may be stripped of their status if the minister sees fit.

I would be prepared to say that the minister would not act in such an arbitrary manner, but the legislation does grant that kind of authority for that kind of power to be so arbitrarily exercised.

Indeed, as the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers put it, this provision “undermines Canada’s commitment to refugees, makes a mockery of our commitment to the United Nations to provide permanent resettlement to refugees and puts at risk of deportation tens of thousands of refugees who have already been granted permanent residence in Canada”.

Fifth, the bill makes changes to the judicial review process in ways that are highly problematic, constitutionally suspect, and undesirable from a policy point of view.

The proposed bill removes the automatic stay of removal when filing for judicial review for claimants from designated countries of origin, claimants under an exemption to the safe third country agreement, claimants whose claims have been determined to be manifestly unfounded or of no credible basis, and claimants who arrive as part of a designated irregular arrival.

Not only does this prejudice certain applicants further, as I noted in my initial remarks about the problem of having designated countries in the first place, it is problematic in that claimants who have a valid claim as recognized by the courts would be forced to fight their court case from abroad. It is difficult enough for such claimants to argue their cases here in Canada, but it becomes even more difficult when they are forced to do so from a distance. If the court finds that the claimant is correct and should be allowed to stay

here, will Canada fund the person's return voyage? Or is the government's plan thereby to end up removing more than needs to be removed and make it more difficult for people to come back?

Sixth and related, the legislation allows the Canada Border Services Agency to establish regulations concerning factors to consider when deferring removal. In this regard, we see a change in the legislation where removal orders are to be enforced as soon as is reasonably practicable, to use the language of Bill C-31, which says that the order must be enforced as soon as possible. This could cause a problem.

• (1325)

Time does not permit me to get into any other concerns, so I will quote the Canadian Civil Liberties Association by way of conclusion:

The provisions of Bill C-31 stand in stark contrast to Canada's legal obligations under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and a variety of international human rights conventions. Furthermore, this bill represents a dramatic departure from the ethos and reputation of Canada....

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the member, but in his substantive comments, unfortunately there were at least a couple of errors of fact and certainly, in my view, mischaracterizations of the bill in its intent.

One of the areas of fact which I suspect he just repeated and probably a researcher got it off the Internet was the notion that the minister is empowered under Bill C-31 with the ability to arbitrarily strip settled refugees of their permanent residency. There is no such power. This is a complete fiction.

In fact, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, adopted in 2002 by the government of which he was a member, in section 108 empowers the minister to make an application to the IRB to revoke permanent residency from people for whom protected status has ceased because they obtained such status through fraudulent means or country conditions have changed.

There is no change in the bill in this respect. The minister has no such power. It is a power that belongs to the IRB and is very infrequently used by that quasi-judicial body.

The member talked about 12 months of detention for smuggled claimants. In fact, they would be released following a positive protection decision by the IRB which, under the accelerated timelines of Bill C-31, would be in a matter of weeks or a couple of months.

The member asked why we would penalize claimants from designated safe countries. There is no such penalty. We have an accelerated process which his party agreed to in Bill C-11 in the last Parliament. The only change is that claimants would not have access, if failed at first instance, to the refugee appeal division, which the Liberal government refused to create in the first place.

How is it penalizing people to not give them access to something which does not currently exist?

Government Orders

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's comments, but they remind me of a recent response of his in a similar situation. In response to a *Montreal Gazette* editorial, the minister wrote not unlike that which he said in response to my comments today:

It is simply incorrect to suggest that C-31 includes any new powers, or loosens any of the criteria in Canada's immigration laws pertaining to the removal of refugee status.

However, as Professor Sean Rehaag of Osgoode Hall Law School pointed out in his response to the minister, who, I suspect, will have a response to that as well, the issue we are concerned about has to do with the cessation provision in Bill C-31 which authorizes the stripping of people's refugee status that underpin their permanent residency, thus making them subject to deportation. As Professor Rehaag noted:

This is a sweeping change to Canadian refugee law, one that puts the permanent residence of tens of thousands of recognized refugees at risk.

While this may not be the sweeping change that has been so characterized, it clearly is a change, unlike that which the minister himself so characterized.

• (1330)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism continually says that Canada exceeds our obligations of international law by simply giving a refugee claimant a hearing. Under the 1951 refugee convention, host countries have the obligation to assess the claim of any asylum seeker who reaches their territory.

Of course, there is no refugee queue. Everyone has the right to seek asylum regardless of how many others are doing so at the same time. There is no obligation in international law for a refugee to seek asylum in the nearest country. Refugees often escape to the nearest country. Often the country is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention and has no legal obligation to protect them. Those people are often at risk of arrest, abuse, detention, demands for bribes, forced labour, et cetera.

I would like to make a brief comment on the minister's comments on previous Bill C-11 about the independent committee to assess designated safe countries. What he said then was that those amendments "go a long way in providing greater clarity and transparency around the process of designation". That is what the minister said about the committee in the last Parliament and he scrapped that committee in this Parliament.

Why does my hon. colleague think the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism may have changed his opinion on the process of designating safe countries?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the minister would have changed his opinion. If the minister wants to offer a response as to why he did, I invite him to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to express my support for Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act.

If there is one thing that Canadians can be proud of, it is the way we treat foreign nationals who seek our protection. Our asylum system is one of the most generous in the world. Currently, Canada opens its doors to one in 10 of the world's resettled refugees.

Our humanitarian efforts have even been recognized by the United Nations. Since the second world war, Canada has granted asylum to over one million refugees. As a Canadian and a Quebecker, I am proud of our humanitarian tradition. Our government is determined to maintain this tradition that Canadians are so proud of.

Canada welcomes 10% of the world's resettled refugees, more than almost any other country. Our government has also increased the number of resettled refugees, with plans to settle 2,500 more by 2013 for a total of 14,500, which is a 20% increase.

The rationale behind Bill C-31 is simple: by focusing our system's resources on the people who genuinely need our protection, we will be better able to help those people. But we can make our system more generous only if we correct the problems in it.

We got closer to that goal with the passing of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act in June 2010, but the fact is that gaps remain in the system. We need more robust measures that are more like the ones in the bill that was first introduced.

For example, our asylum system is already overwhelmed by a significant backlog of claims. The growing number of bogus claims from European Union democracies is only exacerbating the problem. When we consider that virtually all claims from the European Union in recent years were abandoned, withdrawn or rejected by the Immigration and Refugee Board, an independent body, it is quite apparent that too many of our tax dollars are being spent on people who do not need our protection.

What are we to make of the fact that most claimants from the EU abandon or withdraw their claims, if not that the claimants themselves believe they do not need Canada's protection and therefore filed bogus claims?

By building on the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, Bill C-31 would save hard-working Canadian taxpayers \$1.65 billion over five years. I think Canadians would agree that that money could be put to better use than dealing with bogus refugee claimants who abuse our system to enter our country through the back door. Yet that is just what we are doing now. We are using taxpayers' money to help people who should not even be here.

Government Orders

A failed refugee claim costs taxpayers an average of \$55,000 because the current system is far too slow. On average, it can take up to 4.5 years from the time an initial claim is made until a failed claimant is removed from Canada. A number of cases have dragged on for more than 10 years. During this time, claimants can receive free health care and social assistance while their claims are pending. Long wait times mean greater costs for Canadian taxpayers.

It also takes too long for people who need our protection to move through the system. Those who truly need our protection now wait approximately two years—20 months—for a decision on their claims, which is unfair to genuine claimants. Our message to genuine claimants who are waiting patiently in line is that we are sorry. We know that they need protection, but they must wait two years before we can tell them whether they will get it. This is just not fair. It is an abuse of our country's generosity.

● (1335)

This situation deprives genuine claimants of their peace of mind and of the opportunity to quickly obtain protection.

In view of these problems, further improvements to our refugee system are obviously needed. Canadians have had enough. They want our government to take action and improve the system. That is exactly what we are doing with Bill C-31.

This bill will not just improve the current system and the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, it will also provide genuine claimants with protection sooner. The success of the new system depends on our ability to expedite the processing of claims, which is essential. The less time claimants spend in Canada waiting for a decision, the less incentive there is to abuse our generous refugee system and to queue-jump the regular immigration process. In addition, by speeding up processing times for refugee claims, we can provide genuine refugees with protection more quickly.

With Bill C-31, for example, claimants from designated countries of origin could have an IRB hearing within 30 to 45 days, as opposed to the 1,000 or more days it currently takes.

Let us be clear: the independent Immigration and Refugee Board will continue to hear every eligible claim, as it does now, regardless of the claimant's country of origin. In addition, every failed claimant will have access to at least one recourse mechanism, such as the refugee appeal division or the Federal Court. These new processing timelines not only mean that people who are in genuine need of Canada's protection will receive it more quickly, they also mean that we can more quickly remove those who do not.

Given the recent spike in the number of unfounded claims from countries that respect human rights and defend democratic values, and that are not usually source countries for refugees, we must absolutely deter the abuse of our refugee system. Quick removals would deter abuse and contribute to reducing the overall cost of our asylum system.

We need to send the right message to both types of refugee claimants: the genuine and the unfounded. Those who truly need our help will get it even faster, but if someone is not in need of protection, that individual will be sent home quickly. These proposed measures will allow us to continue to meet our domestic and international obligations.

These measures will also help to maintain the balance and fairness that are the foundations of our refugee system. Canadians gave our government a clear mandate to preserve the integrity of our immigration system. Bill C-31 delivers on that mandate.

This bill to protect Canada's immigration system will help to provide a quicker and more secure beginning here in Canada for victims of violence and persecution from around the world. At the same time, it will prevent bogus claimants from abusing the generosity of our immigration system and from benefiting from our health and social welfare services, which are paid for by taxpayers.

Canadians, and Quebeckers in particular, take great pride in the generosity of our immigration system, but they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and seek to take unfair advantage of our country.

For all of these reasons, I urge all of my hon. colleagues in the opposition to support this important bill and to help us pass it quickly.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening all morning to members on the government side speak to the bill. Since we arrived here in May we have been listening to the government continually attacking the most vulnerable people in our country.

Government members describe the way in which refugees come to this country as if it were some kind of decision made by them in far-off countries because it would be fun, because they could scam the system and because they could do a lot better in Canada. That is not right. People who come to our shores, especially those who come by way of the egregious activities of human smugglers, come here because they have no choice. They are fleeing their home countries because they want to save their lives and the lives of their families.

I want to ask a question of the member opposite that plays very much to things that the government apparently is concerned about. The Conservatives talk about how we are losing so much money and how the system is broken. Would it not be better to hire more people to fill the vacancies at the IRB and get the claims processed faster?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, the protecting Canada's immigration system act will provide a quicker and more secure beginning here in Canada for victims of violence and persecution around the world. It will also help us prevent false asylum seekers from abusing the generosity of our immigration system and receiving significant taxpayer-funded health and social services.

Government Orders

Canadians, and Quebeckers in particular, take pride in the generosity of our immigration system, but they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and seek to take unfair advantage of our country.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to the preamble to the question from the member opposite talking about attacking the most vulnerable, Canada has the most generous refugee system in the world.

Many of us in this room have had the privilege and honour of working directly with refugee claimants when they have come here. We have helped them find their way through those early days here, find a place to live and find a place to work. I cannot understand why the opposition would not understand that it is important we have a system in place that actually ensures the security of the Canadian population.

One of the misconceptions that has been repeated over and over again by the opposition, all through this debate and especially this morning, is this myth that somehow Bill C-31 includes the mandatory detention of everyone who arrives as part of a human smuggling event. I would like to ask my colleague to explain the exemptions that are there for those who are under 16, and also how once an actual claim is processed the claimant is no longer detained in the detention centre.

• (1345)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying in my speech, Canada has the fairest and most generous immigration system in the world. However, Canadians have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and take unfair advantage of our country. We have to take steps to clamp down on these abuses. Our government is determined to strengthen the integrity of Canada's immigration system. The protecting Canada's immigration system act will make our refugee system faster and fairer. This legislation would put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and bogus refugees abusing our generous immigration system and receiving taxpayer-funded health and social services.

The bill will also make it possible to offer protection more quickly to those who really need it. The bill will save Canadian taxpayers at least \$1.65 billion over the next five years.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on Bill C-31, a very important piece of legislation. I hope to put some of this into context.

I wish our new elected official from Toronto—Danforth, Mr. Craig Scott were able to participate. He has yet to be sworn in. He has a legal degree from Oxford, London School of Economics and Dalhousie University. He can certainly provide an international lens to this. Canada is not an island. It is important to deal with the issues of worldwide refugee problems, whether they be violence, hunger, persecution for religion or beliefs or not having beliefs. This is something that Canada has to do with other nations.

I have empathy for the minister having to deal with a difficult file. Karen Boyce in my office is directly assigned to deal with

immigration matters. She has worked diligently for 10 years, since I was elected in 2002, processing many claims for people, because we have such a backlog in our system. Sadly, we are not even funded to have a direct immigration person. However, in my office we are dedicated to that service. Karen has basically dedicated her life over the last 10 years to helping people. There is not a day that goes by that she does not change somebody's life.

It is important we talk about this, and think about some of the language that is being used here by the government. In the last couple of minutes I jotted down the words government members are using: protection, take advantage, security of population, abuse, crackdown, bogus. These are the types of words that the government is using to describe the most vulnerable who are coming to our shores, whether they be refugees or immigrants.

I think about this, and I think about my grandfather, Fred Attwood, who came to Canada after the Second World War. How courageous he must have been to come across the ocean, to Windsor, Ontario where he had never been before. He had to try to find a job and save money to send back for his wife, daughter and young son who had been left behind. I thought about how courageous it was. When we go to citizenship ceremonies, we think about how courageous people are. Also, there are the ones who are being persecuted and who do not know their fate. They are often dealing with children.

Let us be straight about this. Canada needs immigration and refugees. That is a reality for us to sustain our quality of life. That is necessary. We have a small population growth right now. That is not going to do, the day we need our pensions paid for, our economy moving and important new skill sets.

Let us put a face on some of these people the government is saying are dangerous, are security issues, who have problems and who we have to make sure are not going to be threatening the general public. They are people like K'naan. He was born in Somalia. He spent his childhood in Mogadishu and lived there during the Somali civil war which began in 1991. Is a person like that a threat? He is a refugee.

How about Adrienne Clarkson, former Governor General of Canada? She emigrated from Hong Kong as a refugee in 1942. She came here, making her mark and contributing to Canada.

How about Fedor Bohatirchuk, a chess master? He has since passed away, but he was persecuted in Ukraine. He came to Canada and contributed for many years.

Sitting Bull, the Sioux chief. He left America for Canada as a holy man who led his people as tribal chief during the years of resistance in the United States. Sitting Bull eventually came here to Canada from the United States.

Government Orders

These are the people we are talking about. So when we see a system that is going to be put in place, we have to be very careful. I do not like the language that is being used. I do not think it is fair. I do not think it is right. It feeds into the base, the negativity. It is almost exhausting to see that this is what Canada is about, that we literally have a refugee problem that is overwhelming the capability of our current government, and that we have to gut our immigration and refugee policies to deal with this plague before it destabilizes our country. That is almost the message the Conservatives seem to be trying to paint.

We do have problems with our immigration and refugee situation. We do want to make improvements. There is no doubt about that. However painting it in this context, locking up people, tearing families apart, having no defined dates, having no capabilities to be able to advocate for themselves, is this what we are trying to espouse?

I do not like to see lists. I have seen this in the past. I was in the Canadian embassy in Washington in 2003. The ambassador said that Canada was going to have certain citizens who, when they entered the United States, would be put on a list because they came from a different country. I asked if we were going to protest that. He said that we were going to accept that. I said that is wrong, because that list is going to grow. Sure enough, it did. It went from 5 countries to 17.

• (1350)

Now there is a situation where our own citizenship is being tiered and defined by the U.S. to this day, with no resistance from the government, not the previous Liberal administration, not the current administration. We have accepted the fact that they will not validate our legal and due process to assign citizenship to the people we want to come into our country. We have allowed them to tier that.

What happens on the Windsor-Detroit border every day is ironic. We have doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, a whole slew of people, some of them were born in Pakistan 40 years ago, who are saving lives.

This is the funny part. Their credentials are not recognized in Canada, so they have to go into the United States and serve in the hospitals there. They are considered a threat to the United States at the border, in many respects because they happen to come from a country that the United States defines as being insecure or having issues, despite having Canadian citizenship. They are actually fingerprinted and photographed. Then they go to their jobs, saving American lives every day.

Ironically, they sometimes save Canadian lives, because when the hospitals are full in Windsor or if there are problems with people that cannot be solved, instead of being sent to London sometimes they will be sent to the United States. They get treated by a doctor who is not qualified to treat them in Canada and cannot get a job here. It is unbelievable. We have not been able to solve that in over 10 years.

The problem we have with this bill is it does not deal with the real situation of the backlog. I am concerned with the delays that are going to take place by not having appropriate staff levels.

We see this on a regular basis. For people waiting for security clearances, what happens is their health clearance goes null after its

expiry date. Then they try to go back and get that and have their security clearance go null again, or wait in advance for many years. We have many cases where people are waiting for many years because of security reasons. We understand and appreciate that. However, why would we not put the resources to get these people moving?

Once again, we are connected to the world in regard to refugees. When there is a situation as in Sri Lanka, or in the past with Jews out of the Second World War, it is for all the world to contribute and do its due diligence to ensure that those who are vulnerable, through no fault of their own, get protection. Hopefully, we can restart their lives so they can contribute to our country and planet.

When we talk about refugees, think about people in the past who were refugees. Bob Marley was a refugee from Jamaica. Olivia Newton-John's grandfather was a refugee, as was Max Born. There is K'Naan, as I mentioned before. There are people like Jackie Chan. He was a refugee because of the Triads in Hong Kong. There is Jerry Springer, and I am not a fan of him, but his parents were German refugees. My own editorial opinion is he has not improved the television I watch, but the point is it is a free democracy.

There is Madeleine Albright. Under the system we are talking about, she would be considered a risk and would have to be vetted through our system the way the government wants to do it. Madeleine Albright and Harry Kissinger were refugees. As I mentioned, Sitting Bull was a refugee. I would bet if one were to look at some of the persecutions of people who did not want to participate in the draft during the Vietnam War, they would probably not be let in Canada anymore. Victor Hugo was a refugee. Here is another interesting refugee, Albert Einstein.

When we talk about this, we need to have some context. That is why I think it is important to note the language coming out. It was interesting to hear the minister talk about polls. In a question to one of my colleagues, he talked about polls wanting Canada to do this. We get calls and false emails all the time claiming refugees are getting all this money. It is not true. It is all a campaign of hate.

On an issue like this, sometimes the proper thing to do is not what is popular but what is right. That is hard to do sometimes, and the Conservatives do not understand that. They see this as a wedge issue.

When the Conservatives use the words, "bogus", "crackdown", "abuse", "protection", "take advantage", "security of the population", I refute that with the refugees who have contributed to Canada and this planet. We have to be there for them, not only in terms of passing legislation but in ensuring they can contribute to our country.

Statements by Members

•(1355)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member spent the weekend at the NDP echo chamber because his comments have nothing to do with reality.

Here is the reality. Canada, under this government, is receiving more resettled refugees than any other country in the world per capita. We resettle 1 out of every 10 resettled refugees worldwide. We have 0.05% of the world's population and take 10% of resettled refugees, but that is not enough. This government is so open to our humanitarian tradition that we are increasing the number of resettled refugees that we are accepting as part of our immigration plan by 20%, but that is not enough. We are increasing the refugee assistance program to assist newcomers in need of our protection with their integration. We are increasing that by 20%, but that is not enough. We are so committed to ensuring that asylum claimants get a fair shake that we are creating, for the first time, the refugee appeal division at the IRB, a full, fact-based hearing process for failed claimants.

This government is maintaining what the UNHCR calls the model asylum system in the world. We are making record large contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Why is the member denigrating the best record in the world when it comes to refugee protection?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I cannot mention who is or is not in the House, but obviously the applause was not for my answer. I wish I were that popular. However, it is a pleasure to have the member for Outremont back in this place.

To answer the minister quickly, if our system is so good, why does he have to establish laws and measures to control it? If it is so good, why does the minister have such little faith in his own legislation? This debate is about moving the control of our refugee information into a small cabal as opposed to having due process to ensure that when refugees show up on the shores of Canada, they are going to have a fair and partial process to become part of our country.

•(1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we go to statements by members, the Chair would also like to welcome the new leader of the official opposition to the chamber.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]**ARTHRITIS SOCIETY**

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that the Arthritis Society has chosen me as honorary co-chair of the Walk to Fight Arthritis. As my colleagues are aware, I lived with arthritis for six years before I had a hip replacement last fall, even though I had already had a replacement in 2007. I know what it is like to live with this pain and difficulty. I am very proud to take on this role.

[*English*]

The march for arthritis awareness will take place in Montreal on May 27 in Jean Drapeau Park. I am very honoured to fulfill my co-chair role with very popular broadcaster Richard Turcotte. We are hoping that through this effort together we will increase awareness and support for the very important work of the Arthritis Society across Canada.

* * *

SNOWSMART

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to highlight a new Government of Canada initiative that will increase the safety of young skiers and snowboarders across the country.

Last week I had the privilege of announcing the government's snowsmart initiative with the Minister of State for Sport in my riding of Simcoe—Grey and supported by the Blue Mountain Resort team of Dave Sinclair and Dan Skelton as well as municipal councillor Gail Ardiel and Mayor Ellen Anderson.

Our government has committed \$200,000 to the snowsmart campaign in conjunction with Smartrisk, the Canadian Ski Patrol System and the Canadian Snowboard Foundation. The purpose of this initiative is to ensure that skiers and snowboarders across the country can participate in winter sports in a manner that is safe and prevents life-threatening injuries.

Many of the accidents that happen on ski hills are preventable and involve young children. It is up to us to lead the safety campaign that ensures that young skiers and snowboarders are hitting the slopes in a fun but safe way.

Canadians should be proud of our winter sport heritage and I am proud to be part of a government that supports safe participation of young people in winter sports.

* * *

[*Translation*]**LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA**

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, we elected our new leader, the member for Outremont, a dynamic leader who will unite Canadians as our first NDP prime minister.

[*English*]

Over the last five months, I travelled across our great country and heard from Canadians about their real concerns: growing inequality, aboriginal poverty, inaction on climate change, the hollowing out of our economy and the growing threat of conflict. I heard from so many people that they are tired of the politics of division and polarization, attack ads and robocalls.

Canadians want a government that will truly represent them, that understands the aspirations of Quebec, that will represent western Canadians instead of taking them for granted.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]*

We have taken a major step toward forming our government.

[English]

I want to thank the people who supported our campaign and the so many people who joined together to elect our new leader. I want to thank my other colleagues who ran in this race.

And I have a message for the Prime Minister: Enjoy being Prime Minister while it lasts. The orange wave is growing and will bring Canada's first NDP government in 2015.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I applaud President Obama's directive last Thursday to expedite approval for the southern leg of the Keystone pipeline.

As we await news on the rest of the route, we must continue to look west, east and north for increased export opportunity for Canada. By selling 99% of our oil to one customer, we discount our oil price by \$15 to \$40 a barrel. That is billions of dollars in discounts every year. This is why we need to find out more about foreign influence intervening in domestic policy.

The Senate's ongoing inquiry into the involvement of foreign foundations in Canada's domestic affairs is about ensuring openness, transparency, disclosure and enforcement in the charitable sector.

Whether we agree with exporting our resources throughout the world or not, the decision is about Canadian jobs, the Canadian economy, Canadian prosperity and Canadians' quality of life.

Canadian policy should not be made by foreign trusts for foreign priorities. Canadian policy should be made at home by Canadians in the best interest of Canada.

* * *

● (1405)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was recently privileged to speak at a meeting of parliamentarians of countries most vulnerable to climate change in Bangladesh.

For many of the world's poorest countries, climate change is not an academic debate but rather a pressing reality faced every day, which threatens energy, food, health, livelihoods, water, in total, human security. If human security was being threatened by war, countries would rise to the challenge to protect the vulnerable. Why not then with sea level rise? We must therefore refocus the climate change debate on humanity, human rights, climate justice and the personal.

The most vulnerable countries understand: 2015 is already too late; the 2°C target will likely be missed; some islands will likely become submerged; and their hopes for enhanced support have continually been disappointed.

Children playing on Bangladesh streets invite the government "to taste climate change". It is salty, they explain, because salt water is already inundating water supplies.

WAR OF 1812

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on June 18, 1812, the United States of America declared war on Great Britain, starting the War of 1812. Our government is supporting many activities across Canada to commemorate this war which helped shape Canada.

Nowhere is this support better employed than in Gananoque in my riding of Leeds—Grenville. On September 21, 1812, Gananoque was the scene of the first skirmish in Upper Canada.

Since October 2010, service clubs, citizens and the 1812 bicentennial steering committee have been preparing to commemorate the town's participation in the war. On June 18 of this year, the public is invited to attend the first eastern Ontario commemoration ceremonies when the town will unveil the redeveloped Joel Stone Park, named after the town's founder and commander of the Leeds Militia in 1812.

I encourage everyone to come out and participate in this important commemorative event.

* * *

*[Translation]***LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA**

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be here with a leader who is a man of conviction and with a team that is united, strong and ready to get results for Canadians.

[English]

I thank my wife, Julia, and my sons, Nathaniel and Jordan, so very much for their love and support. I also thank my incredible campaign team for believing in me.

In the past months, I have met thousands of Canadians who want us to build a stronger and more caring country. They reject cynicism and they have embraced optimism. This was particularly evident with young and aboriginal people. We need to follow their lead. We need to give Canadians a future to believe in.

[Translation]

Let us get to work. We will succeed.

Statements by Members

[English]

POPE SHENOUDA III

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life of Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and the patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Pope Shenouda was a true leader whose spiritual guidance was a source of great strength for Coptic Christians in Egypt and around the world for over 40 years.

Yesterday, thousands of Coptic Christians gathered at the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga to pay their respects to their spiritual leader. Pope Shenouda shared our government's vision of freedom of expression for minority communities and was a strong ally and a powerful voice for religious freedom and human dignity. He fostered a global Coptic spiritual community that thrives today, including here in Canada where he personally named bishops to preside over more than 20 parishes throughout our country. His steady leadership was especially meaningful in recent years, which have been very challenging for the Coptic community.

I join with all Canadians in expressing our sincere condolences to the Coptic community in Canada and around the world on the loss of their beloved spiritual leader.

* * *

● (1410)

**ROYAL CANADIAN AIR CADETS 395 "GRIFFON"
SQUADRON**

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today it is my honour and privilege to welcome Edmonton's 395 Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron, the Griffons, to Parliament Hill on the first stop of its Citizenship Week tour.

The 395 squadron was formed on April 11, 1946, in the greater Edmonton area after the second world war and is the only squadron formed at that time that remains active.

During the 1950s, the 395 Griffons boasted over 200 cadets, making it the largest air cadet squadron in Alberta and western Canada. Today, 395 still parades 160 cadets.

Over the years, the cadets of 395 squadron have earned hundreds of scholarships with over 80 power flying scholarships and a dozen exchange visits.

The aim of the overall cadet program is to develop in youth the attributes of good citizenship and leadership, promote physical fitness and stimulate the interest of youth in sea, land and air activities of the Canadian Forces. The air cadet motto is "To learn. To serve. To advance." The 395 Griffon Squadron does that better than most and, as a retired air force officer whose blood runs air force light blue, I salute it.

Per ardua ad astra.

[Translation]

**LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF
CANADA**

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House with renewed energy, more determined than ever to build the Canada we dream of.

For the past six months, I have had the privilege to run against eight excellent leadership candidates and put forward a progressive vision for Canada. Nathan, Niki, Martin, Brian, Paul, Robert, Romeo and Tom, thank you for that honour.

[English]

I also thank the hundreds of members of my campaign team and those who worked tirelessly on other teams who could imagine a country that we would like to build, a country where Canadians are passionate for a new direction toward economic prosperity that includes everyone, with a sustainable environment and strong social programs. I know we can get there with our caucus united behind our leader and future prime minister, Thomas Mulcair.

The Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the member not to use proper names but ridings or titles.

The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora.

* * *

WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in commemoration of World Tuberculosis Day on March 24.

Tuberculosis still claims 4,600 victims each day posing a significant health risk to poor and malnourished people in developing countries. However, with our government's help, the global fight against TB made incredible strides.

Canada is a significant contributor to the global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and other TB initiatives, such as the World Health Organization's tuberculosis control program.

[Translation]

In 2000, only 28% of victims of tuberculosis had access to proper treatment. By 2009, that number had risen to 69%.

Thanks to CIDA, the government has helped successfully treat more than 4 million victims and helped save more than half a million lives.

[English]

Today, Canadians can be proud of this government's continued efforts to slow the spread of TB and reduce the preventable deaths caused by this terrible disease.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured. I owe tremendous gratitude to an awesome team and the volunteers who supported me. I especially want to tell our new leader, my new leader, that he has my unwavering support. We have a duty to complete the work that our dear friend started, and this is our golden opportunity to do that.

[English]

My voice today is a bit strained but my love and commitment to this party and to this movement has never been more absolute. We must build a better place. We will build a better country. We have come together in ways not thought possible to take on the real opponents that we all face.

Those of us who seek office all owe gratitude, but the gratitude I owe most is to my loving wife, Diana, and my children. My thanks are absolute.

* * *

●(1415)

WINSTON CHURCHILL

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 70 years ago, as Europe teetered on the brink of Nazi evil, Winston Churchill stood only a few feet from where you now sit, at which time he addressed this House with his famous “Some chicken; some neck” speech. In it he declared:

Canada is a potent magnet, drawing together those in the new world and in the old whose fortunes are now united in a deadly struggle for life and honour against the common foe.

Today, until the end of June, the parliamentary library showcases select pages, audio and video clips of this inspirational speech and a signed copy of Karsh's iconic photograph of Churchill.

It is an occasion to celebrate the man who published 41 books, who fought, was captured and escaped during the Boer War, who helped defend the free world against Nazism and who woke America to the Soviet threat with his famous “Iron Curtain” speech at Fulton.

Let us celebrate Winston Churchill, defender of the free world and the greatest parliamentarian of the 20th century.

* * *

PURPLE DAY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Purple Day and it is great to see so many members wearing purple and purple ribbons to help raise awareness about epilepsy.

All members received a card with information about first aid for seizures and I encourage them all to familiarize themselves with the 10 steps. The most important things to remember are to stay calm, keep the person safe and never restrain.

I also thank the House for its unanimous support of Bill C-278, which would recognize every March 26 as Purple Day so we can increase awareness of epilepsy and the impact it has on thousands of Canadians.

Canada is a world leader in this cause thanks to the commitment of people like Cassidy Megan who founded Purple Day and started a global trend.

* * *

MEMBER FOR VANCOUVER KINGSWAY

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I also congratulate the new leader of the NDP, on Sunday, March 18, the NDP immigration critic joined a rally organized by the radical left wing group No One Is Illegal. He also tweeted support for its campaign to end all deportations, even those of violent foreign criminals and war criminals.

What other aspects of the No One is Illegal's radical agenda will the NDP adopt next? Will the NDP demand the repeal of all immigration laws? Will the NDP vote to give immediate amnesty to all illegal immigrants? Will the NDP support human smuggling?

Does the NDP believe Canada is an illegitimate occupying power? Does the NDP endorse violence and destruction of property as a protest against capitalism? Does the NDP endorse terrorism by Hamas and Hezbollah against Israel?

If not, the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway should apologize to Canadians and condemn such dangerous extremism. Otherwise, he is unfit to be—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

* * *

LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, New Democrats came together to elect the leader of the official opposition. It was a race between many respected and dynamic candidates. We can be proud to say that New Democrats across Canada elected a strong and experienced leader to lead Canada's New Democrats to form the next government in 2015.

I am proud to have a leader who worked alongside Jack Layton to unite Quebeckers and Canadians together, a leader who shares our values, a leader with experience and conviction and a leader who will hold the Conservatives to account and fight for everyday Canadians.

More than ever, we are strong and we are united. So today we continue Jack's legacy and rally behind our new leader, the leader of the official opposition. I could not be more proud.

[Translation]

Congratulations to our new leader.

[English]

**LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF
CANADA**

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who want more jobs and lower taxes gave our government a strong mandate to create jobs and economic growth. By contrast, the NDP chose a new leader who will continue to push its high tax, high spending, job killing agenda.

The NDP leader has vowed to bring back a risky job killing carbon tax which would raise the price of everything even though Canadians have overwhelmingly rejected carbon taxes. Canadians cannot afford the NDP's dangerous economic experiments. He has vowed to bring back the wasteful, ineffective long gun registry. This hug-a-thug, soft on crime leader will return Canada to policies favouring the rights of criminals over those of victims.

The NDP leader's drive to hike taxes, his divisive personality and his ruthless ambition would put Canadian families—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1420)

The Speaker: I know it is the first day back but hopefully we can get through question period with a little bit of order.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Conservatives took office, Canada has lost hundreds of thousands of good jobs in the manufacturing sector. The Prime Minister is so clueless that he even went to Electro-Motive in London, Ontario, to tell everyone how great his economic policies were. After all the fanfare, the plant is now closed, and all of those jobs have been exported.

Now the Aveos workers are in the same boat. In Winnipeg, Montreal and Toronto, thousands of families are reeling. Why are the Conservatives not doing anything?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to congratulate the member for Outremont on his success at the New Democratic Party leadership convention. He has certainly accomplished something impressive.

In answer to his question, as my hon. colleague should know, our government has already created over 600,000 jobs thanks to our economic action plan to fight the crisis. We have already created more jobs than any other G20 country, nearly 90% of them full time. There are new jobs in every part of the country. We have done well, and we will keep doing more of the same with our next budget.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are saddling future generations with the biggest environmental, economic and social debt in our history. They are gutting the manufacturing sector and destabilizing the balanced economy that we have built up since the second world war. Today

Oral Questions

we learned that Canada's youth unemployment rate is 14.7% and that 400,000 unemployed young people are looking for work but finding nothing.

Will the Conservatives address this situation in the budget and provide jobs and hope for our young people?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will certainly seize the opportunity afforded by our budget to continue moving in the right direction and building on our success.

[English]

The Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about the importance of economic growth for young Canadians. The reality is that since the worst point of the recession through until today, over 610,000 net new jobs have been created and over 90% of those are full-time, well-paying jobs in every region of the country. We are going in the right direction. At the same time we have lowered taxes to the lowest point they have been in 50 years.

We are putting more power and money and influence into the pockets of individual Canadians so they can choose how they want to live their lives rather than the big government, central control approach that is the hallmark of the NDP.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about how Canadians are going to live their lives when thousands of families are about to lose their livelihood with the shutdown of Aveos. These jobs are about to be exported. That is the only direction they know.

The government is throwing up its hands and saying there is nothing it can do. There is something it could do and it could do it now. The government could enforce the act, save these jobs and do something for a change.

Why will the government not act?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Leader of the Opposition missed the statement that the Minister of Transport made earlier today where he said exactly that: The Air Canada Public Participation Act is the law. The law is the law. The minister is asking the transport committee to step forward and investigate this matter to see what the best approach would be going forward.

With regard to jobs overall and the economy, our government is leading and showing the way forward, with over 610,000 jobs created and the lowest taxes in 50 years. These benefits are being seen all across the country.

The Leader of the Opposition may not like the fact that we are getting results but Canadians know it and they understand that our government has the right way forward.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that Conservative inaction has meant mounting job losses, not gains.

Oral Questions

The Conservatives promised to protect health care funding but they turned their backs on Canadians, short-changing provinces by \$31 billion, that is \$31 billion less for doctors, nurses, and front-line health services that we all depend on.

Will the Conservatives finally work with the provinces to protect our public health care system? Will they live up to their campaign promise on health care transfers?

• (1425)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, our government is committed to a universal, publicly funded health care system. Unlike the previous Liberal government, which gutted our health care transfers, we have actually increased funding to a record level. We have announced a long-term, stable funding arrangement with the provinces and the territories that would see transfers reach an historic level of \$40 billion by the end of the decade.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not what they campaigned on. The Prime Minister made a single health care promise in the last election and he is intent on breaking it. Without consultation, the Conservatives are wreaking havoc on provincial budgets. They have shortchanged the provinces and now they are shortchanging families who rely on these health care services. It is no wonder the provinces feel abandoned.

Why did the Conservatives not tell Canadians their real plan for health care cuts? Why were they hiding it?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even the former adviser to the interim leader of the Liberal Party and NDP strategist agreed that this is the best offer the provinces and the territories could get from the federal government. I think it is an extraordinarily generous offer. It is more generous than the provinces had any right to expect. If I were the provinces, I would stop griping and take the money and get to work reforming the system.

As indicated by recent Canadian Institute for Health Information data, the federal transfers are projected to grow faster than average provincial spending on health care. I will work with my provincial—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

* * *

AIR CANADA

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to simply ask the minister a question again on the Aveos issue.

If the law is the law, the law is very clear. The law requires Air Canada to maintain its operations for maintenance and overhaul in three cities, in Montreal, in Toronto and in Winnipeg. The minister himself said the law is the law, and so the question for the minister is very clear. When is the Government of Canada finally going to step up to the plate and enforce the law, which is the law of the land and the law of Parliament? That is the question.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he should, as I said, refer

to the comments that were made by the Minister of Transport on this very item, where he said that we will be taking that responsible action.

However, to be clear, on the issue of both Aveos and Air Canada, if both opposition parties had their way, the legislation that we put before Parliament would not have passed; Air Canada would have been grounded; hundreds, if not thousands, of people would have lost their jobs; and tens of thousands of Canadians would have been stranded around the world.

On both Aveos and Air Canada, this government is taking the responsible and effective approach, the exact approach that Canadians expect from this government.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that answer is complete nonsense and the minister himself knows it.

Twenty-five hundred people, not hypothetical jobs, not theoretical jobs of what might have happened in 1985 if something else might not have happened, but real people, with real jobs, with highly skilled jobs and real lives are on the street because the government has taken absolutely zero action. Referring a matter to a transportation committee does nothing for the workers who have been laid off.

When is the government going to take Air Canada to court and enforce the legislation, which is—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see from the energy of the leader of the Liberal Party's question that it is pretty clear, given what we saw over the weekend, that the job he is most concerned about is his own.

The fact is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. James Moore: Oh, he does not like it, but that is the truth, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is showing leadership on the Aveos question, just as we have shown leadership on the broader Air Canada question.

As I said, we have put forward the responsible approach to dealing with Aveos to ensure that the Air Canada Public Participation Act is reviewed and enforced. Also, we want to ensure that Air Canada remains a healthy air carrier and continues to serve all Canadians.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very obvious. The government is not prepared to do what is necessary to protect both public safety and jobs. When the bill was passed, they promised to protect two things: public safety and job security. Why is the government not prepared, right now, to guarantee that Canadian law will be obeyed and that Canadian jobs will be protected? That is what must be done.

•(1430)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, the law must be obeyed. That is why the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities made an announcement just before question period.

In all areas, whether we are talking about Aveos, Air Canada or the entire economy, our government's economic action plan, from the beginning of the recession up to this point, and into the future, will continue to be an approach that will protect jobs in all regions of the country.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are shifting their responsibility for health care, prisons and old age security onto the provinces. That means higher costs and fewer services for Canadian families. A budget is about making choices. The NDP wants seniors to live in dignity. The Conservatives want to cut old age security benefits.

Why not give our seniors priority over prisons and F-35s? Why not take care of seniors first in the upcoming federal budget?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the official opposition seems to be suggesting today that somehow the transfers to the provinces have not kept pace. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Transfers to the provinces for health, education and social services have never been higher in the history of Canada. Federal support has reached historic levels at \$60.9 billion, and will continue to grow every year through 2024.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what he is not saying is that those are under old agreements and that since May 2 the Conservatives have been working to push those transfers down.

The reality is, Conservatives promised they would not attack retirement security and they are breaking their promise. Even Conservatives know that OAS is sustainable. The PBO says so. The government's own actuarial tables say so.

Provinces will have to find more money for seniors in already stretched budgets.

Canadians believe seniors should live in dignity, so why are the Conservatives cutting OAS? Why are they not listening to seniors who are phoning, writing and emailing members' offices? Why did they hide this agenda from the Canadian public in the last election—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will not speculate on the budget, but our government started this debate on old age security in an effort to protect future generations of Canadians.

Oral Questions

Old age security will become unsustainable on its current course. Ignoring this problem is simply dangerous for young Canadians like me. Our government is working to sustain OAS for Canadians today and future generations. Canadians can be proud of our Canadian retirement system. We are living up to our promises.

I ask the NDP members, why did they not vote for our increase in GIS or any of those other things that support seniors in this country?

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has its priorities all wrong.

Job numbers in Canada are still going down. This month, 2,600 Aveos workers abruptly lost their jobs. As good paying jobs vanish, more Canadians will need the EI benefits they paid for all of their working lives.

However, the Conservatives are trying to save money on the backs of Canadians to pay for their ineffective prison agenda and blind corporate tax cuts. These are the wrong priorities.

Will they protect the EI services that Canadian families rely on?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is job creation and economic growth.

This year, as in other years, we have added resources into the EI system to make sure that those individuals who are eligible for EI receive the benefits they need.

We want to make sure that every Canadian in this country who wants to work has an opportunity to work. Our program, our economic action plan, has delivered on that.

We ask the NDP members, why will they not ever support us on these initiatives to get Canadians working?

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts simply do not support the parliamentary secretary. Since 2007, the Conservatives have been cutting jobs at Service Canada. This is penalizing unemployed Canadians who have played by the rules, worked hard all of their lives, but who now cannot get the benefits they paid for.

Thousands of Canadians are forced to wait more than four months just to receive their EI benefit. Families in need cannot afford to wait that long for their cheques.

Will the minister protect families by guaranteeing there will be no further cuts to Service Canada in the next budget?

Oral Questions

• (1435)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again I will not speculate on the budget, but over the last number of weeks we have added over 475 employees to our processing efforts in order to process EI claims, and we have shifted over 120 staff from part time to full time. We are doing what we need to do to make sure that Canadians are receiving the services they need.

I ask the NDP to support us in our efforts, as they never have before, to make sure that we are supporting Canadians in getting the jobs they need and the support they need.

* * *

AIR CANADA

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no limit to the government's disdain for Canadian workers. First, the Minister of Labour takes away the right to collective bargaining. Then she takes away the freedom of speech by calling the cops when workers show their displeasure.

Why does the minister have so little respect for Air Canada employees?

When will the minister get up and apologize to the workers of Air Canada, or is she, like the Treasury Board minister, just saying, "See you on WestJet"?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do hope that the opposition members listen carefully to what I am about to say because I would hate for them to make the mistake of repeating that untruth outside this place or inside this place again.

The description of what just happened did not happen. There was no conversation with any workers. We acted on behalf of the public interest and the national economy by passing Bill C-33 in order to ensure that there would be services for Canadians and to ensure that we protected the economy. That is what we did.

We are on the side of Canadians. We are not on the side of the big union bosses.

* * *

[*Translation*]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, details on the fraudulent calls made by the infamous Pierre Poutine have been leaked by Conservatives to some journalists. The Conservatives have a list of voters who were denied their right to vote. They know who received the calls, and I suspect they know who made the calls. In any event, they are not telling the whole truth.

Did the Prime Minister's Office give the order to provide the media with information on the ongoing investigation in order to spin the story? Does Elections Canada have the same information? When will there be a public inquiry into this scandal?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario,

CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member cannot make a false allegation true simply by repeating it louder and louder. The reality is that Elections Canada has the authority to conduct an investigation and the Conservative Party will co-operate. We have followed all the rules and we will continue to do so.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the vote fraud investigator for Elections Canada has confirmed in a sworn affidavit that there was a second voter suppression campaign but, get this, instead of impersonating Elections Canada, they were actually impersonating Liberals. My God, is there nothing they will not do to try and win?

We know there were over 7,000 calls made on election day by Pierre Poutine. The Conservatives said they know nothing about it, but then leaked all kinds of details to journalists. When will they stop using fake names, fake excuses, come clean with the Canadian people and call a public inquiry?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for 8 Mile for the question. He has been trying to give this party a bad rap with no evidence whatsoever, but on Friday night he gave all Canadians a bad rap. I will simply say I am not afraid to stand and defend our party, but he is not *The Real Slim Shady*.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of trying to hip-hop over the issue, why do we not deal with the real gangster rap, which is the growing rap sheet of ethical violations under the Conservative government? Step forward, industry minister. He broke the rules. The Prime Minister promised he was going to drain the ethical swamp in Ottawa. Instead, the swamp is up around the cabinet table.

When are the Conservatives going to boot that guy out of caucus and do the right thing for Canadians?

• (1440)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I accept the conclusions of the commissioner. The commissioner recognized that there was never an attempt to influence public servants. The company in question never secured a contract and there was never any prospect or question of an advantage on my part. However, in the future, I will take further precautions when approached by Canadians seeking more information about the services and programs delivered by their government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about a mere oversight. The Minister of Industry violated the Conflict of Interest Act. That is a serious matter, yet the industry minister has not even been given a slap on the wrist. He was simply told not to do it again. The Conservatives have no qualms about giving huge responsibilities to someone who plays favourites with his friends.

Oral Questions

Is the Prime Minister really going to allow someone with such low ethical standards to be a member of his cabinet?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I accept the conclusions of the commissioner. Once again, the commissioner recognized that there was never an attempt to influence public servants' decisions. Also, the company in question never secured a contract. There was never any question of an advantage on my part.

In the future, I will take further precautions when approached by Canadians seeking more information about the services and programs delivered by their government.

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AIR CANADA

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the other two parties are arguing about hip hop and rap, 2,800 people are losing their jobs right now. One of the fundamental problems is that this government does not seem to have a transport minister. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities should be there to protect the interests of Parliament and the interests of Canadians, and to enforce the law.

The Air Canada Public Participation Act was created for two reasons: the security and continued existence of maintenance centres in Mississauga, Winnipeg and Montreal. The minister has not even met with Air Canada yet. What is he waiting for to enforce the law and protect the workers, who have come to listen to us?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that the workers in this sector, as in many others, are in a very difficult situation right now. In my riding, 3,000 forestry jobs have been lost, and I know that it is not easy for families. That being said, this is the same law that was in place when the member was in government. It has not changed, and at the time, they themselves said that these were private companies.

Today, I asked the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to call on all of the witnesses. If the member has questions for Air Canada, Aveos, the unions or any of the other stakeholders, he can ask them, because he is a member of the committee. After that, the committee will send me a report.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not about writing reports and asking questions. This is about the minister doing his job.

When we were in government, we respected maintenance centres. That is the law. The Conservatives were the ones who brought it in. It is clear and it is guaranteed. Even deputy ministers say that it is so important that it cannot be touched because it is the law.

Now the Conservatives want to transfer the jobs to a \$21-million hangar in Windsor, and the minister's government is putting \$4 million into that. When will the government protect and help families instead of letting a minister take over human resources management for Air Canada? What will the government do to protect those families?

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, last week, I heard the responses given by the mayor of Montreal and all the mayoral candidates.

The law is the law. Under the Air Canada Public Participation Act, Air Canada is required to keep its maintenance centres in Montreal, Mississauga and Winnipeg. We are following developments and will continue to do so. This is a complicated matter. This law was analyzed in the distant past, and it has not changed since 1988. We are going to act diligently in the interests of all Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Air Canada is breaking the law. It is as simple as that.

Thousands of Canadians are now unemployed because the government chooses to do nothing in terms of trying to deal with those employees and in fact the law.

The law is clear. The corporation is to maintain operational and overhaul centres in the city of Winnipeg, the Montreal urban community, and the city of Mississauga. That is the law. The government says it is tough on crime. It is time to get tough on Air Canada.

Is the government going to change the law, or is it going to enforce the law? It is a simple question.

• (1445)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that it is devastating for workers who have lost their jobs.

Today I have asked the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to hear Aveos, Air Canada and the union as soon as possible and report its conclusions to me.

The law is the law. Air Canada will have to respect it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for months, the NDP has been saying that the Conservatives did not do their homework on the F-35s. Now, the Auditor General is about to prove us right: there was no open bidding process, cost estimates were unrealistic, the government had no plan B and the decision-making process was problematic.

Will the government finally admit that it did not do its homework on the F-35s, and will it do what is needed to rectify the situation?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will not comment or speculate on the report.

Canada has been a partner in the F-35 program for the past 15 years. Our plan is to continue in the program. We have not signed a contract for purchase. We retain flexibility and we remain within our budget.

Oral Questions

Ultimately we will ensure that the air force has the aircraft needed to do the job we ask of it.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Tom Cruise may be flying an F-35 in *Top Gun II*, but this is not Hollywood and the brave men and women of our Canadian Forces need real planes for mission success.

Last week the U.S. government accountability office testified that the F-35's mission systems are "immature and unproven" and just 4% complete.

After 15 years the F-35 remains more fiction than reality. Now we hear that the Auditor General has lost his loving feeling for the program.

Is the government prepared to accept the AG's critical report, or will it ignore his concerns too?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I may say once again, we respect the important work of the Auditor General. Of course, we will deal with that in due course when the report is finally tabled. Until then, it would be inappropriate for me, as I believe it is for the member opposite, to comment further on these issues that he does not know anything about.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives launched their anti-Wheat Board agenda, we warned it would hurt Canadian farmers. Now Viterra's sell-off will leave the majority of Canadian grain handling in foreign control. These are world-leading assets built by Canadian farmers.

This is a shortsighted sellout that will strip us of a leading Canadian company and leave farmers vulnerable to foreign interests. Why will the Conservatives not realize their misguided priorities are hurting Canadian farmers?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should come west and see how excited western Canadian farmers are about the fact that they now have the freedom to market their own grain based on what is best for their own businesses, whether that is on the open market or through a new and viable Canadian wheat board.

Canada's agriculture sector continues to present great opportunities for western Canada, namely more buyers for Canadian products.

The Investment Canada Act will provide for the review of significant foreign investments in Canada, if the transaction is subject to review. The test is that it must be of net benefit to Canada.

We look forward to continuing to give western Canadian farmers more choice as they do their business.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me give the parliamentary secretary a hand. Two-thirds foreign-owned control is not in Canadian interests.

Not only will we lose control over the grain trade, but we will create a near monopoly in farm supply. I wonder how Canadian

farmers in the west, which I have visited numerous times this year, really feel about that one.

This deal poses a huge risk for Canadian farmers and needs to be reviewed. We are calling on the Competition Bureau to review this deal. The deal also needs scrutiny under the Investment Canada Act.

Will the Conservatives stand behind us and support our calls for a transparent review of this diabolical deal?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the ones we are going to stand behind are western Canadian farmers. We are going to continue to stand there. The NDP can oppose development and change in western Canada, but we are going to move ahead and give western Canadian farmers a choice in the opportunities that they need to succeed in an exciting and new agricultural environment around the world.

Western Canadian farmers now have the freedom to market their own grain. They will be going into the fields in the next few months. They are excited about the great opportunities that we are providing for them. We will continue to represent their interests across the country.

* * *

● (1450)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week we learned of some concerning reports coming out of Bamako, Mali where certain elements of the Malian military appear to have staged a coup d'etat. The militants have attacked the presidential palace and have detained several ministers. This is a direct attack against the democratic institution and will of the Malian people.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs kindly give us an update on the government's reaction?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government finds the situation in Mali to be very troubling. Upon learning of the coup last week the minister immediately called upon those responsible to withdraw so that constitutional order, peace and stability may be restored. When they did not, Canada suspended direct aid to the Malian government.

In a statement today, the UN Security Council condemned the forcible takeover. Canada will not in any way back this illegal rule. Democracy must be respected. Differences must be resolved by dialogue and democratic process.

*Oral Questions***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have been asking the minister to confirm or deny that he is planning to gut the Fisheries Act, but he will not give a straight answer.

Last week, two former Progressive Conservative fisheries ministers called the proposed changes foolish. One called the government “ideological right-wingers with very, very limited understanding, intelligence or wisdom”.

Even Conservatives know that eliminating fish habitat protection will set us back decades. Therefore, I ask again, is the government going to eliminate habitat protection, yes or no?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while no decision has been made, the government is reviewing fish and fish habitat protection policies to ensure we are respecting conservation objectives.

Recent speculation about the current review is inaccurate. However, the government has been clear that the existing policies can be arbitrary and do not reflect the priorities of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, not all Canadians agree.

Last week, 625 prominent scientists wrote to the Prime Minister, asking him not to weaken environmental protection measures. They say that weakening the Fisheries Act will affect water quality and the fishery and will damage Canada's international credibility.

This government may be able to censor its own scientists, but it cannot ignore expert advice. Will the minister confirm that he will not gut the Fisheries Act?

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we have made no decisions but we are reviewing the policies. We want to focus our activities on protecting natural waterways that are home to the fish Canadians value most, not on flooded fields and ditches.

* * *

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by this point Canadians are catching on to a pattern with the Conservatives. When the Conservatives get caught doing something wrong, they blame someone else.

The latest attempt in this sorry saga is the Minister of the Environment's attempt to cover up his muzzling of scientists by blaming the media. The problem, he says, is a few grumpy journalists. It is another Conservative attack on democracy, this time by denigrating the fourth estate.

Will the minister retract this absurd accusation and admit that his heavy-handed communications protocols are keeping good science out of the hands of Canadians?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said any number of times in this House,

Canadians can be proud of their scientists, particularly of the scientists working at Environment Canada and the contributions they make to science journals and the general media.

Our department continues to make its experts available to the media on a regular basis, many hundreds of times, in fact, in the past year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, the Canadian Science Writers' Association, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression and even the journal *Nature* and the BBC all denounce the fact that the Conservatives are muzzling researchers by limiting their access to the media.

When will this government come up with a clear policy that protects the rights of scientists to inform Canadians?

• (1455)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government in the history of Canada has invested so much in our scientists and researchers. In fact, our scientists and researchers have more work to do and more research to publish as a result of our historic levels of funding, which were voted against by the opposition.

We are very happy to see Canadian scientists at symposia and conferences all around the world sharing their work, publishing articles and giving thousands of interviews. The NDP members are way off base.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has to come clean and explain exactly how this works.

A Tory MP is charged with DUI: he gets kicked out of caucus. There are rumours surrounding a female cabinet minister: she gets the boot. Another cabinet minister leaves briefs at his girlfriend's: he is shown the door. Now a Conservative cabinet minister is convicted by the conflict of interest commissioner for blatantly breaking the rules and he gets to stay.

The question is this: why are there no consequences for violating their own accountability act?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again I accept the conclusions of the commissioner. She recognized there was never an attempt to influence the decisions of public servants. The company in question never secured a contract. There was never any prospect or question of any advantage on my part.

Oral Questions

In the future I will take further precautions when approached by Canadians seeking more information about the projects and programs delivered by their government.

[Translation]

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government keeps ending up in reprehensible situations in matters of ethics.

First there was the in and out scandal. Then there was the matter of electoral fraud, which keeps snowballing. Now it is the minister's turn to violate the Conflict of Interest Act.

Why are the Conservatives not doing anything about this? What will they do the next time this comes up?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I accept and take note of the findings in the commissioner's report. I want to remind hon. members that the commissioner recognized that there was never an attempt to influence public servants. The company in question never secured a contract and there was never any prospect or question of an advantage on my part.

However, in the future, I will take further precautions when approached by Canadians seeking more information about the services and programs delivered by their government.

* * *

[English]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, CBC's *The Fifth Estate* has uncovered disturbing facts about the Canadian Forces' response to the search for Burton Winters in Makkovik in January. His family described the military's explanation as, "One excuse wasn't enough for them, they had to give five". It was not the weather, it was not the protocol. They closed the file and later said they had no equipment available to do the search. One former SAR coordinator called the CF report "abysmal, misleading and wrong".

What is the state of our search and rescue system in Canada? Will the government establish an independent inquiry to find out the full truth about what happened and what needs to be done to protect Canadians like this boy in Makkovik?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again our hearts and prayers go out to the family of young Burton Winters. It was certainly a tragedy. This young man was a member of the Canadian Forces junior rangers program. Members of his troop assisted in his search.

As the member would know, the reality is that the first call to the Canadian Forces came some 20 hours after young Mr. Winters was last seen. The second call was placed 51 hours later and Canadian Forces assets were deployed.

We have improved the protocol with respect to the communications between the province and the federal government and that protocol has ground search and rescue responsibility with the province.

FINANCE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the task force for payments system review has called for legislation that could save \$32 billion in productivity gains by modernizing our payments system. According to the task force, Canadian payments regulation is being quickly outpaced by countries like Romania and Peru. Modernizing our payments system would help the economy but we are stagnant due to the government's focus on the interests of big money and big banks, not on new entrants and new ideas.

Will this minister take the decisive steps necessary to overhaul our payments system to further our national interests and for the well-being of Canadian consumers and small businesses?

● (1500)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member and that is why we appointed the task force to do the work. It has just recently finished its work and submitted the report. We look forward to giving it the thorough review it deserves after the intense work done by the panel, and taking steps pursuant to the recommendations that are in the report.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, opening new markets and creating new opportunities are at the centre of our government's job-creating ambitious pro-trade plan. We know increasing Canada's trading relationships with Asia-Pacific regions will bring jobs and greater prosperity to Canadians in every region of this country. This includes deepening our trade and investment ties with large economies like Japan.

Will the parliamentary secretary share with us the progress Canada is making in our trade relationships with Japan?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his hard work on the trade committee.

*Oral Questions***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Increased engagement with Asia is important to Canada's future prosperity and growth. Japan is a global economic power, the third-largest economy in the world and one of Canada's most important trade and investment partners. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced the launch of negotiations toward a Canada–Japan economic partnership agreement. Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Canada continues to take historic steps forward in advancing our Asia–Pacific ties to benefit workers, families and businesses across this country.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the real reason a search and rescue helicopter was not sent to Labrador to find missing 14-year-old Burton Winters is now clear. The rear admiral said he could not spare a helicopter in case it was needed elsewhere. This tragedy should never have happened.

In spite of this and the lack of search and rescue resources when needed, the government is closing the maritime rescue sub-centre in St. John's with its local knowledge and expertise. Because the member for Labrador will not, will someone in the government tell the Prime Minister he has to reverse his decision or more lives will be lost?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in this House, we would never close the sub-centre in St. John's if we thought we would be putting mariners or anybody else at risk. We will continue with the process of closing the sub-centre.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for weeks, we have been asking the government to deal with the drug shortage. The NDP asked for an emergency debate. Medical experts and the provinces are asking the federal government to intervene, but the minister is still refusing to carry out her responsibilities. The drug shortage caused by the poor regulation of the industry is putting the lives of thousands of Canadians at risk.

When will the minister finally bolster regulations in order to prevent other shortages?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, almost two weeks ago we offered the provinces and territories access to the national emergency stockpile system to help them alleviate the drug shortage. So far no one has asked for any drugs, which shows the provinces seem to be doing well in managing the drug shortage.

My department has also approved 32 requests for individual emergency access to needed drugs.

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada welcomes those who work hard and play by the rules. However, this does not include those who seek to take advantage of our generosity. Human smuggling is dangerous and preys upon the most vulnerable groups so terrorist organizations such as the Tamil Tigers can make a profit.

Recently, the Prime Minister made an important announcement to protect our country, our communities and our citizens from human smuggling. Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on these important safety measures?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to inform the member that our government has provided significant support to Thailand to help combat the scourge of human smuggling. Through the anti-crime capacity building program, we will help Thailand to stop being used as a conduit for human smuggling by criminals and terrorists. This builds upon the important measures in the protecting Canada's immigration system act.

Our message is clear to criminals and terrorists considering human smuggling operations: do not do it.

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[Translation]

FRENCH AT WORK

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four months have passed already since an announcement was made that a committee would be struck to examine the use of French in federally regulated businesses in Quebec. Four months of empty promises.

While the Conservatives have been wondering whether there is a problem, we have learned that the problem does exist even within federal institutions. The decision of an IRB member—a unilingual anglophone—had to be reversed because he accepted as evidence a French document that he could not read, let alone understand.

When will the Conservatives take action to recognize the rights of Canada's francophones instead of spouting the usual rhetoric?

● (1505)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the NDP has nothing to teach us about the language of work. Its proposal will only increase paperwork and useless haphazard regulations. Our government is determined to promote and protect the French language in Canada.

That is why I had the honour of announcing in this House that we are establishing an advisory committee tasked with determining whether there is a problem with the use of French in federally regulated private businesses. That is a responsible approach. We must take the time to do things properly and not haphazardly, as suggested by the opposition.

*Routine Proceedings***AIR CANADA**

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is what the then-minister of transport said on March 2, 2011, about the arrangement to transfer aircraft maintenance employees from Air Canada to Aveos:

...we have been dealing with Air Canada on this for months. We wanted assurances. Are the jobs going to be secure? Will the maintenance facilities in Mississauga, Winnipeg and Montreal be maintained? Will the employees be saved? Will they have the same pension benefits, entitlements and so on? The answer is yes on all fronts.

Will the Minister of Finance, who is responsible for enforcing the law, acknowledge that his government was played, and will he enforce the law?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I know that this is a disastrous and difficult situation for workers and their families. Just before question period, I asked the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to call on Air Canada, Aveos, the union and other experts wishing to weigh in as soon as possible. I repeat: our government believes that the law is the law. Under the Air Canada Public Participation Act, Air Canada is required to maintain operational centres in Montreal, Mississauga and Winnipeg. We are keeping tabs on the situation and will listen to everyone who wants to express an opinion.

POINTS OF ORDER

[English]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a point of order concerning the Standing Order 31 statement by the member for Calgary Northeast.

On March 18, I participated in a community march in Vancouver to mark March 21, which was the international day for the elimination of racism. Dozens of groups participated along with a thousand citizens from all walks of life with one purpose, which was to demonstrate support for equality and tolerance.

The member's implication that this constitutes support for terrorism or criminals is profoundly false and uncalled for. Previous Speaker rulings have established that S.O. 31s are not to be used for personal attacks, no less false ones.

I would ask that the member withdraw his unfair remarks and apologize to the House as I know he is an honourable member and he would not want misleading comments to stay.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a point of debate and not a point of order. The fact is the member attended an event and distributed copies of a poster on the Internet published by No One Is Illegal, an anarchist organization that supports Black Bloc violent anarchist tactics and opposes any limits on immigration, including the deportation of criminals. Therefore, the member raised a

legitimate political objection to that member's endorsement of that organization.

The Speaker: It does seem to be a question of debate. In terms of the content of the S.O. 31, I will go back and look at the blues to see if there is appropriate cause for me to come back to the chamber.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 99 petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-310, an act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons). The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

● (1510)

HEALTH

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Health in relation to Bill C-300, an act respecting a federal framework for suicide prevention. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in relation to the main estimates, 2012-13.

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PAN-CANADIAN STRATEGY FOR CHRONIC CEREBROSPINAL VENOUS INSUFFICIENCY (CCSVI) ACT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-410, An Act to establish a Pan-Canadian Strategy for Chronic Cerebrospinal Venous Insufficiency (CCSVI).

She said: Mr. Speaker, my bill aims to establish a pan-Canadian strategy for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI. The bill calls for the minister to convene a conference with the provincial and territorial ministers of health to establish a pan-Canadian strategy including: ensuring that proper health care is not refused to a person who is seeking or is obtaining treatment for CCSVI outside Canada; identifying the most appropriate level of clinical trials for treatment of CCSVI to place Canada at the forefront of international research; estimating the funding necessary for clinical trials and tracking individuals who have received the treatment; establishing an advisory panel composed of experts who have been actively engaged in diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI; and ensuring that clinical trials begin by July 1, 2012.

I hope all hon. members will support this bill.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions on behalf of my constituents.

The first petition is with respect to a permanent video relay service in Canada. The petitioners call on the CRTC and Industry Canada to introduce a universal video relay service for the American sign language and la langue des signes québécoise in Canada and to restore the VR services cancelled in January.

The petitioners believe it is unacceptable that these communities do not have equal access to telecommunication services in their first language, a right as declared by the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

OLD AGE SECURITY

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my second petition, the petitioners call on the government to maintain funding for the OAS and make investments in the guaranteed income supplement to lift every senior out of poverty in accordance with the New Democrats opposition day motion of February 2.

The petitioners note that the government has threatened to make changes to OAS, including increasing the age of eligibility. They say that this is an attack on the poorest seniors who rely on that money for daily living expenses.

POVERTY

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions.

The first petition is from a number of constituents and others across Manitoba. The petitioners call on the federal government to develop and implement Bill C-233, a strategy for poverty elimination, in consultation with the provincial, territorial, municipal and aboriginal governments.

● (1515)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by many petitioners from across the

Routine Proceedings

country. It addresses the Criminal Code to decriminalize the selling of sexual services and criminalize the purchasing of sexual services and providing support to those who desire to leave prostitution.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the final petition requests that the government implement a comprehensive national action plan to combat human trafficking. As we know, the government had announced in the last election that it would do that.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in keeping with the questions that have been raised in the House about the importance of keeping the maritime rescue sub-centre open in St. John's and to present a petition signed by 1,300 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

This is only one of many petitions, again pointing out how important it is to keep that centre open with the local knowledge and the expertise there in terms of what has transpired in our province. It is not just about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This is about Canadians. It is about anyone who travels in the North Atlantic.

The situation out there, when people are out on the ocean, is that it is so volatile from time to time that we really need to know there is someone there who will have an innate knowledge and who knows exactly what to do and where to go when something dangerous happens.

This is why people are signing these petitions, saying to the government that it must understand how serious the issue is. It is not one to be taken lightly. We really must keep this open. There is no way the government will save \$1 million closing the centre. If it did, what is the price of a life? What we have seen happen as a result of having the centre there is that so many hundreds of lives have been saved. We are talking about 10,000 miles of coastline. We need to keep this maritime rescue sub-centre in operation.

The Speaker: I see there are still several members wishing to present petitions and there is only 11 minutes left under this rubric in the orders of the day. Therefore, I encourage members to be as brief as possible so we can get everybody in.

The hon. member for Davenport.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the petition I am presenting today is on behalf of the members of my riding in Davenport, Toronto who have profound concerns about the government's proposed online spying legislation.

In particular, the people in my riding have a deep and abiding faith and love of the democratic process and of democracy. One of the foundations of that is the protection of privacy and civil liberties.

This proposed lawful access legislation would diminish that by allowing law enforcement agencies to pick and choose people's private information at their own request without a warrant from a judge. The people in my riding have concerns about that.

Routine Proceedings

RAILWAY SAFETY

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition today that is signed by many people and deals with railway crossings in Southwest Middlesex.

The petitioners request railway safety devices, including gates, flashing lights and bells at all public rail crossings in the municipality of Southwest Middlesex and Newbury and particularly installation at Pratt Siding, where a number of accidents and deaths have occurred.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today asking for a royal commission on the environment and health given the chemicals and dangers to human health present in our environment now. The petitioners feel it would be worth looking into.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a large number of Canadians, some from Newfoundland and some from other parts of Atlantic Canada, who are concerned about the marine rescue coordination centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador being closed.

Contrary to what the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans said in the House today, lives will certainly be at risk if this centre closes. At this point, it is responding to 500 incidents a year, saving the lives of 600 people in distress. The importance of having people with local knowledge who are engaged in working on the sea, on ships, crews, individual fishermen, the places they go, the names of the communities and the local current conditions and everything else are extremely important to operating efficiently to save lives.

This is not a call centre. This is a rescue coordination centre with key people who have tremendous marine experience doing the job of coordinating rescues to continue to save lives. It should not close, nor should the one in Quebec. The government is not paying enough attention and giving enough priority to search and rescue.

SUICIDE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a number of petitions signed by people from Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia, including a number of first nations communities.

The petitioners call on Parliament to meet the public health challenges posed by suicide by adopting legislation that would recognize suicide as a public health issue, to promote evidence-based solutions to prevent suicide and its aftermath and to define best practices for the prevention of suicide.

• (1520)

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today as the official opposition critic on post-secondary education. I presenting petitions that have been sent to me from the greater Ottawa region, Kingston and Sudbury.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to create a post-secondary education act, which would remove the federal

funding for post-secondary education from the social transfer to the provinces and create a new transfer of funds dedicated solely to post-secondary education in our country to ensure that our post-secondary education system has importance given to good quality education that is publicly accessible and affordable to all who wish to have post-secondary education.

FOREIGN AID

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour a few weeks ago of attending an event in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador regarding a very energized group of youth known as RADHOC. It has several petitions, one of which is regarding foreign aid and how essential it is for developing countries to promote sustainability within the region receiving the aid.

The petitioners request the House of Commons to increase the Canadian foreign aid policy to 0.7% of GDP in keeping with the millennium development goals.

PRODUCT SAFETY

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition today, started by two high school students, Katie van der Sloot and Rachel Brown, of Medicine Hat. This petition was signed by hundreds of citizens from Medicine Hat and across Canada.

The petitioners ask the government to ban triclosan, a chemical used in herbicide, hand sanitizers and other products, to protect Canadians.

OLD AGE SECURITY

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I present a petition today with regard to seniors' pensions.

The petitioners ask that the government not increase the age from 65 to 67. They are joined by tens of thousands across the country who are concerned. Many of them have actually signed online petitions. These individuals signed this hard-copy petition and asked me to present it to the House.

ABORTION

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today. They are both from citizens on Vancouver Island, from communities such as Nanaimo, Ladysmith, Parksville and many from Qualicum Beach near where I live.

The petitioners draw attention to the fact that Canada is one of the very few developed countries in the world that has no law to protect the unborn. They note that Canada is the only nation in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, without any laws at all restricting abortion. They note the Supreme Court has said that it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation.

Therefore, they call upon the House of Commons to speedily enact legislation that protects unborn Canadians to the greatest extent possible.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions from residents of my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The first petition deals with the urgent crisis of climate change and the fact that we do not have a climate plan in Canada. The petitioners ask that we take note of the fact that, according to the government's own agency, the National Round Table on the Environment and on the Economy, climate change will cost the Canadian economy by 2020 \$5 billion a year rising to \$43 billion every year if we do not take action.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from petitioners in Sidney/North Saanich and it deals with the issue of the proposed threat to the coastlines of British Columbia with the federal Conservatives' interest in removing the current moratorium and allowing supertanker traffic from Kitimat to the west toward China.

The petitioners demand that the Government of Canada stop promoting a specific project and protect the interests of British Columbians.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 428, 430, 448, 449 and 450.

[Text]

Question No. 428—**Hon. John McCallum:**

With regard to the government's expenditure plan, by year for fiscal years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, what are the comprehensive details of all government spending on statutory items not included in the Main Estimates or any Supplementary Estimates, including: (a) the department expending the funds; (b) the amount spent; (c) the legislative authority for the spending; (d) the purpose of the spending; and (e) the reason why the item was excluded from the Estimates?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the information requested cannot be provided in the timeframe allotted to respond to this question, as an extensive manual search of records would be required.

Forecasts of statutory expenditures are presented in the estimates for information purposes only. They are included in the main estimates if the necessary legislation has been approved and a reasonable estimate can be made of the amount. If an organization is seeking additional annual voted expenditure authority in supplementary estimates, any new statutory items will be added and material revisions to forecasts of existing statutory items will also be made.

There are some statutory items not listed in the estimates. Two common items are the spending of proceeds from the disposal of

Routine Proceedings

surplus crown assets under the Surplus Crown Assets Act, and refunds of amounts credited to revenues in previous years under section 20 of the Financial Administration Act. In both of these cases, the amounts are generally small and are quite difficult to forecast. Other amounts may not be included in the main estimates or supplementary estimates because of the timing of the payment, such as payments made after the preparation of supplementary estimates (C) and before the end of the fiscal year.

All expenditures are reported by department by statutory item in the ministry summary sections of volume two of the Public Accounts of Canada, found at <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/recgen/txt/72-eng.html>. The ministry summary presents any authority available from the previous year and, for statutory items, the forecasts included in main estimates and supplementary estimates and adjustments.

Question No. 430—**Ms. Charmaine Borg:**

With regard to the impending "lawful access" legislation, (a) has the Minister of Public Safety identified any cases where online privacy legislation has hindered police investigations and threatened public safety; and (b) has the Minister of Public Safety made any statements concerning the second call-out in three years by the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs to police departments across the country to submit cases where the refusal by an Internet Service Provider to provide the personal information of a customer has "hindered an investigation or threatened public safety" and, if so, what is the content of these statements?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), today, telecommunications service providers, TSPs, may provide authorities, without a warrant, with basic subscriber information under the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. The problem is that there is no consistency across the country in how service providers respond to these requests: sometimes they respond in a timely manner, but often they respond only after considerable delays, if at all.

Specifically, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre in Ottawa, in 2010 the average response time for a basic subscriber information, BSI, request was 13 days, and only 72.5% of requests were fulfilled.

One TSP only responds to BSI requests on Fridays, regardless of when the requests are submitted.

Another TSP only accepts BSI requests via email, which can be problematic in emergencies.

Routine Proceedings

In December 2010, New Brunswick RCMP began to investigate the distribution of child pornography. Police suspected an individual who was using a TSP that had historically not shared information with police. As a result, local police applied for a court order. There was a substantial delay and by this time the case had gone cold as the suspect had stopped his activities. Due to this delay, abuse could have been prevented at an earlier date, as it was later discovered that this suspect had been abusing two young boys to create child pornography. Several months later, the suspect resumed his online activity. This time the TSP was cooperative with police requests. The suspect was charged with possession and distribution of child pornography.

In 2007, the RCMP assisted with an international investigation in which suspects located in Canada were attempting to defraud American corporations of approximately \$100 million. The investigation required police to find the individuals who were committing these fraudulent activities. The suspects were constantly on the move and police needed the immediate support of the TSPs to determine the location of these networks. However, the service providers would not provide police with the basic subscriber information they needed. Because of the lack of cooperation from the TSPs, it took eight full-time technical investigators five days to finally locate and arrest the suspects. The suspects successfully defrauded victims of \$15 million. Had police been provided with the information when it was requested, the value of the fraud would have been reduced considerably and police resources would have been used more effectively.

A child was abducted in British Columbia in 2011. An amber alert was broadcast and, fortunately, the suspect returned the child. However, the suspect was not apprehended and his location remained unknown. Through further investigation, police obtained an Internet protocol or IP address associated with the suspect. Police contacted the TSP directly and were advised that it was against policy to provide subscriber information related to an IP address without a production order. Police advised the TSP that the suspect had already abducted one child and that other children could possibly be at risk. The TSP decided to provide the information and the suspect was located and apprehended less than 24 hours after police received the information.

In response to (b), the Minister of Public Safety has not made any public statements concerning the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs' request for the submission of cases where the refusal to provide information has hindered an investigation.

Question No. 448—**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:**

How many childcare spaces were created in fiscal years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2010-2011, in each province and territory with the financial assistance of the government?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through the child care spaces initiative announced in budget 2007, the Government of Canada has been transferring an additional \$250 million per year to provinces and territories to support their priorities for child care spaces, so they can continue to build their child care systems to meet the needs of their own citizens.

In the last five years, the federal government has transferred over \$1.25 billion to provincial and territorial governments specifically for the creation of child care spaces. This is in addition to the \$850 million being transferred to the provinces and territories for early childhood development and early learning and child care.

Since 2007, federal officials have been monitoring provincial and territorial child care space announcements and have informally tabulated that there are plans to create over 102,000 new child care spaces so far. Some jurisdictions are also investing in enhancing the quality of their spaces, or their affordability.

The Government of Canada's approach is one that respects provincial and territorial primary responsibility for the provision of social and education services for children and families, including the design and delivery of early childhood development, early learning and child care policies and programs.

This approach reflects the fact that each province and territory has different priorities. Each jurisdiction is designing and delivering child care programs and services that best meet the needs of its families and children. Some jurisdictions have chosen to focus on child care space creation, while others are concentrating on wages or training for child care providers.

In addition to transfers to provinces and territories, the government provides direct supports, such as the universal child care benefit, and tax measures, such as the child care expense deduction, to families with children in support of early childhood development, early learning and child care for a total of over \$6.2 billion in 2011-12. This is the largest investment in early childhood development and child care in the history of Canada.

Question No. 449—**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:**

How many childcare spaces were created for official-language minority communities in fiscal years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2010-2011, in each province and territory with the financial assistance of the government?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through the child care spaces initiative announced in budget 2007, the Government of Canada has been transferring an additional \$250 million per year to provinces and territories to support their priorities for child care spaces, so they can continue to build their child care systems to meet the needs of their own citizens.

In the last five years, the federal government has transferred over \$1.25 billion to provincial and territorial governments specifically for the creation of child care spaces. This is in addition to the \$850 million being transferred to the provinces and territories for early childhood development and early learning and child care.

Routine Proceedings

The Government of Canada is working to enhance the vitality of official language minority communities while at the same time respecting that provincial and territorial governments have primary responsibility for the design and delivery of early childhood development, early learning and child care policies and programs.

As the Government of Canada, we play an enabling role, transferring significant funding to supplement and support each province and territory's own investments. We do not direct or oversee the design and provision of early childhood services. The provinces and territories are accountable to their own citizens, not to the Government of Canada, for their policy decisions, activities and expenditures in this area.

Since 2007, federal officials have been monitoring provincial and territorial child care space announcements and have informally tabulated that there are plans to create over 102,000 new child care spaces so far. Given the informal nature of the tabulation, it does not include a breakdown of spaces by official language minority communities.

Question No. 450—Ms. Judy Foote:

With regard to Marine Atlantic's executive hiring practices: (a) where has the position of Chief Information Officer historically been located; (b) where has the position of Operations for the ports of Channel-Port aux Basques, North Sydney and Argentia historically been located; (c) what is the rationale for the historical position locations; (d) why was the position of Chief Information Officer moved to St. John's; (e) are there plans to move additional positions out of Channel-Port aux Basques; (f) what steps were taken to recruit a candidate who lived in or who would relocate to Channel-Port aux Basques when filling the Chief Information Officer position; (g) what were the job criteria required for the Chief Information Officer; (h) did the job posting specify that a successful applicant had to reside in or work in Channel-Port aux Basques; (i) how many applicants were there for the position of Chief Information Officer; and (j) how many applicants were there from Channel-Port aux Basques?

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, in response to (a), the position of chief information officer was located in Channel-Port aux Basques.

In response to (b), for Channel-Port aux Basques, the position of terminal manager is located at the marine terminal; for North Sydney, the position of terminal manager is located at the marine terminal; and for Argentia, the position of assistant terminal manager is located at the marine terminal during the period May to October to cover the operating season for the Argentia to North Sydney service.

In response to (c), the locations of all staff at Marine Atlantic are determined based on how best to meet the operational and customer service requirements of the corporation.

In response to (d), Marine Atlantic did not make a decision to move the position of chief information officer to St. John's. The decision was made to provide candidates with the option of work location, either Port aux Basques, North Sydney, or St. John's, as stated in the job advertisement to ensure that a large pool of qualified individuals would apply for the position.

In response to (e), we have no plans to move positions within our organization. However, we always have to ensure that the organization is flexible and responsive to changes in labour markets and customer requirements.

In response to (f), for senior leadership positions within the corporation, Marine Atlantic follows a standard recruitment strategy and engages an executive search firm that uses extensive search techniques to attract top talent.

In response to (g), the high level education and skills criteria for the position included the following: a degree from a recognized university in a relevant field of study, such as computer science or engineering, with an MBA considered an asset; a minimum of 10 years of senior IT or IM leadership experience; significant experience in financial management, human resource management, risk management and performance management; and a successful results oriented background that included leadership initiative, customer service, efficiency and motivational skills.

In response to (h), the job posting stated the following: "The position will be located in either Port aux Basques, St. John's or North Sydney".

In response to (i), there were 124 applicants for the position of chief information officer.

In response to (j), there was one applicant from Channel-Port aux Basques.

* * *

● (1525)

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 424, 425, 426, 429, 431, 432, 434, 435, 436, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447 and 451 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 424—Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:

With regard to all expenditures between \$8,000 and \$10,000 by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency since January 1, 2006, what are the details of these expenditures broken down by (i) the names of the people or organizations to whom payments were made, (ii) the amounts of the payments per recipient, (iii) the dates the payments were issued, (iv) the description of the purpose of each expenditure?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 425—Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:**

With regard to the Canada Post Corporation (CPC) and its employment of President and CEO, Deepak Chopra and Group Presidents, Jacques Côté and Kerry Munro: (a) what does the CPC provide each individual in terms of (i) salary range, (ii) vehicle allowance or provision of car or driver, (iii) expense account for food, drink, alcohol and hospitality, (iv) out-of-town accommodations for the individual; (b) in each of the years between 2009 and 2011, how much did each of these individuals expense to the CPC for (i) food, (ii) travel, (iii) hotels, (iv) hospitality, (v) drinks/alcohol, (vi) vehicle use; (c) what were the itemized amounts and descriptions of each individual's individual expenses as identified in the answers to (b); and (d) if the CPC provides any of these individuals with a vehicle for his use, as identified in the answers to (a)(ii), broken down by individual, (i) what is the model and make of the car, (ii) how much does this benefit cost the CPC on an annual basis?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 426—Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:

With regard to all expenditures between \$8,000 and \$10,000 by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada since January 1, 2006, excluding grants and contributions, what are the details of these expenditures categorized by (i) the names of the people or organizations to whom the payments were made, (ii) the amounts of the payments per recipient, (iii) the dates the payments were issued, (iv) the description of the purpose of each expenditure?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 429—Hon. John McCallum:

With regard to government communications, what is the number, by department, of non-exempt staff (i.e., departmental staff and non-political staff within the office of a Minister or Minister of State) who prepare in whole or in part: (a) for Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, (i) responses for question period, (ii) talking points/media lines, (iii) speaking notes for debates, (iv) speaking notes for public events; and (b) for backbench government Members of Parliament, (i) question period questions, (ii) talking points/media lines, (iii) speeches for public events, (iv) speeches for debates in Parliament, (v) written notes for public events, (vi) written notes for Members' statements under Standing Order 31?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 431—Ms. Olivia Chow:

With regard to Canadian bridges, since 2005: (a) how many incidents have there been of concrete, or other large debris, breaking and falling from bridges (i) nationally, (ii) broken down by municipality; (b) what are the details of each incident of concrete, or other large debris, breaking and falling from Canadian bridges, including (i) the size of the debris, (ii) the damages reported as a result of the falling debris, (iii) the injuries or fatalities reported, (iv) the date and location of the incident, (v) the economic impact caused by the resulting road closure; and (c) what plans does the government have to prevent future incidents of concrete falling from Canadian bridges?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 432—Ms. Olivia Chow:

With regard to air safety: (a) how many inspections were done each year from 2004 to 2011, broken down by (i) audits, (ii) traditional inspections, (iii) process validation inspections, (iv) companies; (b) how many employees are conducting such audits and what is their profession (e.g., pilots, mechanics, other technicians); (c) what is the number of companies found to be in violation of air safety regulations and the number of enforcement actions as a result, broken down by company; and (d) what is the number of enforcement actions from inspections abandoned following the introduction of the Safety Management System, broken down by company?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 434—Mr. Matthew Kellway:

With regard to the next generation fighter aircraft capability: (a) what is (i) the exact number of requirements, (ii) the exact wording of the specific requirements that can only be met by the F-35A; (b) has the government received written confirmation from other major jet suppliers, including Boeing, Saab or Dassault, indicating that the requirements outlined in (a)(ii) will not be met by 2020, and, if so, what are the dates

of the correspondence; (c) does the F-35A currently meet the requirements outlined in (a)(ii); and (d) can the F-35A meet all the requirements for Canada's next generation fighter aircraft by 2020?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 435—Mr. Sean Casey:

With regard to translation services: (a) how many contracts were entered into since January 1, 2011, for translation from a non-official language into an official language by (i) the Privy Council Office, (ii) the Prime Minister's Office, (iii) the Office of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, (iv) the Office of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, (v) the Department of Citizenship and Immigration; and (b) for each contract, what was the (i) cost, (ii) duration, (iii) scope, (iv) translation service provider, (v) source language, (vi) target language?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 436—Mr. Sean Casey:

With respect to the television advertisements "Our Veterans Matter", "The Pride of Our Country", "Veterans' Week Vignette", and other 2011 Veterans' Week television spots: (a) how many different advertisements were produced or used to promote Veterans' Week in 2011; (b) what was the total cost (production, airtime, etc.) for the advertisements in (a); (c) what was the cost to produce the television spots, broken down individually by advertisement; (d) what company or companies produced the advertisements, broken down individually by advertisement; (e) what was the cost of television airtime for the advertisements, broken down individually by advertisement; (f) on which television channels were the advertisements aired; (g) what was the cost of online airtime for the advertisements, broken down individually by advertisement; (h) on which online platforms were the advertisements aired, broken down by free media (e.g., posting to YouTube) and fee media (e.g., online commercials); and (i) which programs or divisions of Veterans Affairs Canada were responsible for (i) overseeing/coordinating production of the advertisements, (ii) financing the production of the advertisements, (iii) financing the purchase of airtime both on television and online?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 439—Mrs. Djaouida Sellah:

What is the amount of spending by the federal government in the riding of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert since fiscal year 2004-2005 to today (i) by department or agency, (ii) by program or initiative?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 440—Mr. Kennedy Stewart:

With regard to grants, contributions and contracts by Western Economic Diversification Canada in 2009: (a) what funding applications were approved by the Minister's office, identified by (i) project name, (ii) applicant name, (iii) number of times previously submitted, (iv) date approved, (v) amount requested, (vi) amount awarded, (vii) sector, (viii) federal electoral district determined by application address; (b) what funding applications were rejected by the Minister's office, identified by (i) project name, (ii) applicant name, (iii) total amount of submitted applications, (iv) date rejected, (v) amount requested, (vi) sector, (vii) federal electoral district determined by application address; (c) for each federal electoral district, what is the total value of funding requests within each federal electoral district that were (i) approved, (ii) turned down; and (d) what untendered contracts were issued by or on behalf of the Minister?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 441—Ms. Laurin Liu:

What is the total amount of government funding allocated to the constituency of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles between fiscal year 2007-2008 and the last fiscal year, broken down by (i) department or agency, (ii) initiative or program, (iii) year, (iv) amount, (v) recipient?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 442—Ms. Laurin Liu:**

With regard to hydraulic fracking: (a) which chemicals have been approved for use as hydraulic fracking fluids; (b) which chemicals are being used as hydraulic fracking fluids in Canadian projects; (c) what are the titles of the studies or reports done or in progress, by or on behalf of the government, that cover, in whole or in part, the subject of (i) the environmental impacts of hydraulic fracking, (ii) the long term impacts of hydraulic fracking on aquifers and fresh water supplies, (iii) the health impacts of hydraulic fracking; (d) what sites in Canada are being monitored for contamination or excessive pollution as a result of fracking; (e) what is the total number of cubic meters of water that have been permitted to be used in hydraulic fracking, (i) per day, (ii) by project; (f) how many instances of contaminated water have been linked to fracking since 2000, broken down by (i) year, (ii) project; (g) what impacts do working in hydraulic fracking projects have on the health of citizens living within close proximity to hydraulic fracking projects; (h) what are the cancer rates for citizens living in communities that are in close proximity to hydraulic fracking projects; (i) what events linked to hydraulic fracking have caused (i) property damage, (ii) illness, (iii) death to humans and animals; (j) which companies have been registered in Canada to conduct hydraulic fracking; (k) what is the complete list of federal regulations to which hydraulic fracking operations are subject, and is the government planning new regulation for hydraulic fracking operations; and (l) what consultations has the government undertaken, formally or informally, on the subject of hydraulic fracking?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 443—Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:

With regard to the dismantling or transformation of the cargo ship Kathryn Spirit by the company Groupe Saint-Pierre: (a) what federal statutes and regulations apply to the transformation of the ship; (b) which departments are responsible for enforcing the statutes and regulations in this type of situation; (c) has Environment Canada assessed the environmental risks of the operation; (d) has Environment Canada attended any meetings with Groupe St-Pierre and other departments or levels of government; (e) what was the outcome of those meetings; (f) what are Environment Canada's evaluation criteria for this type of operation; (g) what were the results of the environmental assessment; (h) what measures has Environment Canada or any other federal department taken to ensure that there is no environmental accident before, during or after the operation; (i) what federal standards does this type of operation have to meet; (j) does the company dismantling or transforming the ship have to obtain a certificate of authorization from Environment Canada or any other department before proceeding; (k) what are Canada's obligations under the Basel Convention in this type of situation; (l) what are the federal government's and the company's responsibilities in the event of an environmental accident; (m) has Environment Canada or any other federal department compiled a list or is it aware of other similar operations undertaken elsewhere in Canada; (n) has Environment Canada ever refused to allow an operation of this type to proceed; (o) where is the ship from; and (p) what portion of liability do the federal government and the provincial government bear in this type of situation?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 444—Mr. Hoang Mai:

With regard to the allegations of and investigations into corruption at the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA): (a) how many employees have been fired or constructively dismissed over allegations of corruption, (i) what was their position or role at the CRA, (ii) how many have left under unfavorable circumstances over allegations of corruption, (iii) how did these allegations come to light at the CRA, (iv) were the CRA employees given the specific cause for their dismissal, (v) what are the different reasons for their dismissal; (b) under which authority does the CRA conduct investigations into allegations of corruption and with what investigative tools; (c) how many internal investigations were there at the CRA (i) this year, (ii) in the past two decades; (d) does the CRA employ internal auditors whose responsibilities include investigating allegations of corruption, and, if so, (i) how many such Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) internal auditors does the CRA employ, (ii) what are their job descriptions; (e) does the CRA employ external auditors whose responsibilities include investigating allegations of corruption, and, if so, (i) how many such FTE external auditors does the CRA employ, (ii) what are their job descriptions; (f) what was the budget for those internal and external auditors identified in (d) and (e) in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011; (g) what is the 10-year trend for the budgeting and FTE staffing of internal and external auditors at the CRA; (h) has the CRA's internal capacity to investigate increased or decreased and, if so, by how much; (i) are there different departments within the CRA handling internal investigations into allegations of corruption; (j) what are the different processes involved in an

investigation into allegations of corruption at the CRA, (i) at what time in the investigative process is the RCMP involved, (ii) how many times has the RCMP been involved in investigative processes at the CRA, (iii) how many of these instances have resulted in further investigation; (k) can the RCMP investigate allegations of corruption without CRA consent and, if so, how many times has it happened in the past; (l) what information concerning allegations of corruption is shared by the RCMP and the CRA, (i) can the CRA ask the RCMP for updates on ongoing investigations, (ii) does the RCMP provide progress reports or recommendations to the CRA at the end or during investigations, (iii) how long is the average duration of investigations, (iv) what is the level of communication between the CRA and the RCMP during investigations, (v) is the government planning on improving the process, (vi) have there been recent steps to improve these relations; (m) who at the CRA has the authority to ask (i) for internal investigations, (ii) for external investigations; (n) following investigations into allegations of corruption by the CRA, how many charges have been laid, (i) how many charges have led to convictions, (ii) what are the most common charges, (iii) what departments are more vulnerable to allegations of corruption; (o) what are the different evidence-gathering impediments when investigating these allegations, (i) is the Canada Evidence Act ever used by CRA investigators or auditors, (ii) has the CRA ever asked the Department of Justice to reform the Canada Evidence Act; (p) what is the level of information-sharing between the CRA and different bodies such as, but not limited to, (i) federal or provincial departments, (ii) federal or provincial agencies, (iii) the provincial police and municipal police; (q) how does the CRA plan to eliminate corruption at the CRA; (r) have there been any studies or task forces mandated to look at how best to eliminate corruption at the CRA; (s) what are the mechanisms recently put in place to eliminate or take into account corruption practices; (t) what will be the effect of cuts to expenditures at the CRA on the CRA auditor or internal investigative capacity; (u) of the known cases of corruption, is corporate tax fraud or individual tax fraud more prevalent and, consequently, what departments are most scrutinized by internal investigators; and (v) what are the CRA internal investigation guidelines?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 445—Mr. Glenn Thibeault:

What are the criteria used by the government and the Minister of Industry when determining whether an anti-competitive practice has had, is having, or is likely to have the effect of preventing or lessening competition substantially in a market, pursuant to paragraph 79(1)(c) of the Competition Act?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 446—Mr. Glenn Thibeault:

What is the total amount of funding allocated by the government for the fiscal year 2010-2011 within the constituency of Sudbury, specifying each department, agency, initiative, and amount?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 447—Mr. Glenn Thibeault:

With respect to sport funding: (a) what is the total amount of government funding for each fiscal year since 2008-2009, up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated to amateur sports, specifying each department or agency, initiative and amount; and (b) what is the total amount of government funding allocated to sport injury prevention and awareness for each fiscal year since 2008-2009, up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated to amateur sports, specifying each department or agency, initiative and amount?

(Return tabled)

S. O. 52

Question No. 451—**Mr. Sean Casey:**

With regard to government advertising: (a) which departments or agencies were engaged in any television advertisement by a department or agency of the government during the television broadcast of any Super Bowl game from Super Bowl XL (2006) through Super Bowl XLVI (2012) inclusively; (b) what were the stated objectives and purpose of each advertisement; (c) when did each advertisement run; (d) what was the cost of each advertisement; (e) which private companies were involved in the conception, design, and production of the ads; (f) were any advertising contracts sole-sourced and, if so, which ones and why; (g) what was the target audience of each campaign; (h) in which television markets did they appear; (i) what analysis was or will be done on the effectiveness of any such advertisement; (j) who undertook or will undertake that analysis, and at what cost; and (k) which of these advertisements failed to meet the stated objectives of the campaign, and why?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate by three members.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 19, Aveos shut down all of its operations in Montreal, Mississauga and Winnipeg, while maintaining the operations of its subsidiary, Aeroman, in El Salvador.

This will be devastating for about 3,300 unionized and non-unionized employees, and constitutes a direct threat to maintaining Quebec and Canadian expertise in the maintenance of jumbo jets and in high tech. Montreal has been hit especially hard, with the loss of about 2,400 unionized and non-unionized jobs.

In 1988, as one of the conditions for privatizing Air Canada, the Conservative government insisted that maintenance centres would have to remain in Montreal, Mississauga and Winnipeg. These conditions were included in the Air Canada Public Participation Act. The importance of the aerospace industry is one of the reasons why the Minister of Finance is responsible for enforcing the 1988 legislation, which is why I addressed my question to him today.

Furthermore, on March 20 the Quebec premier threatened to take legal action against Air Canada because it violated the 1988 act, and against the Government of Canada because it failed to enforce the legislation.

The mayors of Montreal, Winnipeg and Mississauga also highlighted the importance of acting quickly and bringing the parties together in order to preserve the infrastructure and the high tech jobs. The mayors reminded us, correctly, that Air Canada is not an average private company, but rather our national carrier. We therefore need to come up with solutions in the spirit of the 1988 legislation, under which Air Canada must keep its maintenance

centres in their municipalities—not in Windsor, but in those municipalities.

In this unstable context, Air Canada pilots have also publicly expressed their concerns about the safety of the planes they are flying. It is all very worrisome.

There is also an urgent need to debate this matter because of the dubious negotiations surrounding this shutdown and the entire issue of the depletion of Air Canada's assets since 2005. On March 19, 2012, Aveos filed for CCAA protection, stating that, "its main client reduced, cancelled and deferred maintenance work...which resulted in about \$16 million in lost revenue in less than two months".

Experts agree that Air Canada had to have known that its service provider was in trouble. But instead of helping Aveos, Air Canada took work away from it. Yet Air Canada has a contract with Aveos to maintain its planes until 2013. Why did Air Canada push Aveos to the brink of bankruptcy? And why did Aveos allow Air Canada to do so and not demand that the company honour its contractual obligations?

Air Canada's parent company is ACE Aviation Holdings, which plans to pay its shareholders a final bonus of nearly \$300 million on April 25. According to economic reporter Martin Vallières, by liquidating various parts of Air Canada, including its technical services, ACE Aviation Holdings has managed to pay its shareholders roughly \$4 billion over the years, through stock redemption and other procedures.

By failing for years to compel Air Canada to obey the 1988 act—this is not a new situation—the Government of Canada has been a willing accomplice in liquidating the assets of a Canadian company to benefit shareholders who, increasingly, are foreign, including Robert Milton, ACE Aviation Holdings' president, who, as the instigator of this shady financial operation, has paid himself \$52 million in salary and bonuses since 2006.

In conclusion, unless this situation is turned around, this government's inaction will leave Air Canada a sick corporation, a pale imitation of its former self, a company that failed to meet its legal obligations to maintain, primarily in Montreal, its top-quality aircraft maintenance expertise.

● (1530)

Mr. Speaker, I therefore request an emergency debate, because what is happening is completely lacking in common sense.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a critically important issue.

As we heard today in question period, it appears that the government is somewhat acknowledging there could be a violation of the law, through the Air Canada Public Participation Act, to the degree in which it is now referring it to a committee.

We disagree. We believe that the government needs to take stronger action. I would argue that all members of the House currently believe something has really gone wrong here. We in the Liberal Party acknowledge that Air Canada has in fact broken the law.

Speaker's Ruling

Earlier today in question period, I read precisely what the Air Canada Public Participation Act says and it guarantees those jobs. I would like to emphasize how critically important this issue is.

In terms of the law itself, on April 12, 1988, here in the House of Commons, the Conservative deputy prime minister at the time, Don Mazankowski, said, first, "Maintenance and overhaul centres in Montreal, Winnipeg, and Toronto are fundamental to the success of Air Canada". Second, "None of these centres will lose its importance". Third, "The centres will continue to expand". Fourth, "The company fleet maintenance will continue to be done at those locations". Fifth, "The act would have to be amended if there were going to be any modification concerning the transfer of Air Canada's overhaul centres to another location".

The law is very clear. The issue we need to debate today in an emergency fashion is whether the government will enforce the law or change the law?

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that you might want to consider canvassing the House to see if there would be leave to accommodate this very important debate today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indeed, we too are requesting an emergency debate on the closure of Aveos' Canadian facilities. I will not launch into a substantive debate because I believe we will have the opportunity to do so during the emergency debate.

We have heard a lot about this issue today and for the past week. I would like to emphasize the need for this emergency debate and the reasons why we have to have it right now.

We believe that with the closure of the Aveos facilities, Air Canada is currently violating the law. We also know that since Aveos has declared bankruptcy, it has already announced its intention to liquidate assets as soon as possible, while currently under bankruptcy protection. That protection will be lifted on Tuesday, April 3.

As parliamentarians in the House of Commons, we have to be prepared for the moment when this protection is lifted in order to prevent the liquidation of assets. We have to protect not only the jobs, but also the expertise that the company has developed over the years, initially through Air Canada of course, and ensure that Canada can maintain its expertise in aeronautics. It would be extremely harmful if Aveos were to leave and if it had to be scattered to the wind because we did not react quickly enough.

For those reasons, we think there should be an emergency debate in the House of Commons and we are requesting one as soon as possible.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I listened carefully to the presentations by the hon. members for Ahuntsic, Winnipeg North, and Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques and I understand and very much respect the importance they are giving this matter.

However, in these matters, the Speaker must be guided by the Standing Orders. Standing Order 52(5) indicates very clearly that "the Speaker also shall have regard to the probability of the matter

being brought before the House within reasonable time by other means".

• (1535)

[*English*]

The chair notes that the budget presentation is scheduled for this Thursday and this will be followed by four days of debate in which members are accorded very wide latitude in discussing economic matters of interest to them and to their constituents. In that sense, the Chair is not persuaded that this matter, as important as it is, meets the requirements of the Standing Orders at this time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering, given your ruling, is it possible to request unanimous leave of the House to allow for the debate to occur?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North is seeking unanimous consent of the House to hold an emergency debate tonight. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

[*Translation*]

There is another point of order. The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a clarification pursuant to your decision.

In my presentation, I said that Aveos' creditor protection will be lifted on April 3. Mr. Speaker, you said that there will be four days of debate on the budget to be presented on Thursday. The budget debate will end after the bankruptcy protection is lifted. Thus, the company could liquidate its assets in the meantime.

I believe this is an important factor to be taken into consideration in making your decision. If we wait until the budget debate is over, it could be too late for the House to take action. I was wondering if you could reconsider your decision after consultation.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I do appreciate the point raised. There are other factors for the Speaker to take into account as to whether or not it meets the test. I mentioned one, that the debate tonight would just be a debate in and of itself. In that respect, I do find that the opportunity to debate during the budget would satisfy the need for members to address the issues that have been raised.

Therefore, the Chair considers the matter closed in that regard.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: There are still two minutes left for questions and comments for the hon. member for Windsor West.

The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Windsor West for his intervention on this very important bill. Given the fact his riding borders on the U.S. border, as he said in his speech, he has had one staff member dedicated to immigration for the past 10 years. I would like to ask the hon. member how bill C-31 would affect not only him and his staff but also the people in his riding?

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is of great concern because we have a number of different immigration files from countries with lots of troubling issues. If we had further complications with people being detained and held, there would certainly be repercussions for their wellbeing once they have run through the immigration system.

We all know that being detained for a long period of time or separated from family creates trauma. Right now, we actually have few psychological services available in the Windsor region area, especially for youth and children. Therefore, I would be worried about the imprisonment and locking up of people who would later become Canadian citizens and their not having the support services to deal with those tragedies and complications.

It ultimately affects our economy. The health and welfare of people is necessary for them to be productive. That is one of the concerns I have with the bill, that is, not having the services to be able to point people in the right direction.

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act.

All Canadians should be concerned about the increase in refugee claims in recent years from countries that are generally considered to be safe and democratic. That is because the numbers clearly demonstrate that an increasing number of refugee claimants in Canada simply do not need our protection. This has been a concern for some time. Allow me to provide an overview of the statistics that demonstrate this from the last year alone.

In 2011 a significant portion of refugee claims came from the European Union. Claims from this region alone accounted for 23% of all claims last year, up from 14% in 2010, more than from Africa or Asia. On average, EU claims were abandoned in 14.5 months or withdrawn in 10 months. In recent years virtually all EU claims were withdrawn, abandoned or rejected. The bogus claims from among the 5,800 EU nationals who sought asylum last year cost Canadian

taxpayers \$170 million. Hungary, an EU member state, has become Canada's top source country for such refugee claims. Hungarians made over 2,400 refugee claims around the world in 2010. Of those, 2,300 were in Canada. That is 23 times more claims made in Canada than in the rest of the world put together. By comparison, the United States received only 32 Hungarian refugee claims in 2010. I think these numbers speak volumes.

Our refugee system was designed to provide protection to those who genuinely need it, people who have escaped brutal regimes, violence, oppression and persecution in these countries. These people need to come to Canada for protection or they risk losing their lives. However, the majority of claims are coming from safe and democratic countries that respect human rights. The fact that Canada receives more refugee claims from the democratic European Union than from Africa or Asia should be a clear wake-up call. Clearly, there is something wrong with our refugee system and it needs to be fixed.

This is how immigration lawyer Julie Taube summed up the situation under the current immigration system. She said:

I'm an immigration and refugee lawyer in Ottawa, and a former member of the Immigration and Refugee Board. I can tell you from theory and practice that the current refugee system is very flawed, and cumbersome, and definitely needs an overhaul. It takes up to two years to have a claimant have his hearing. And there are far too many bogus claims that clog up the system, and use very expensive resources at a cost to Canadian taxpayers.

...I have clients who've been waiting since 2009, early 2010 to have their hearing, and I represent many claimants from, let's say Africa, the Mid East countries, who base their claim on gender violence or Christian persecution in certain Middle East countries, and they have to wait, because the system is so clogged up with what I consider to be unfounded claims from citizens of safe country of origin.

The reality is that instead of waiting patiently to come to Canada through the immigration process, too many people are trying to use our asylum system as a back door to gain entry into Canada. These bogus claimants do not want to play by the rules. Instead, they use our immigration system to get to the front of the line. All the while these claimants clog our refugee system and make those who legitimately need it to wait far too long before their claim can be dealt with. Let us not forget the huge expense to taxpayers and the enormous waste of taxpayer dollars. On average, a failed refugee claimant costs approximately \$55,000. The simple fact is that the generosity of Canada's social benefits, including taxpayer-funded welfare benefits and our general health care system, which is a source of immense pride for Canadians, is the draw factor for many European claimants.

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The designated country of origin policy would provide the minister with a more flexible tool to respond to spikes in unfounded refugee claims. To help reduce the pull factors for unfounded claimants, the designated country of origin policy would allow for expedited processing of refugee claims from countries that do not typically produce refugees. It is important to note, however, that whether or not a country is designated, every eligible refugee claimant would continue to receive a hearing before the independent Immigration and Refugee Board. Claimants from those countries would be processed in about 45 days compared to 1,038 days under the current system.

● (1540)

All claimants, regardless of country of origin, would continue to have the ability to seek judicial review of their claim by the Federal Court. Claimants from countries of origin that have not been designated would get access to an additional level of appeal for the first time, as they would have access to the new refugee appeal division.

Bill C-31 is necessary since the many days it takes to process refugee claims is what attracts unfounded claimants to Canada in the first place. On average, it can take up to four and a half years from the initial time a claim is made until the failed claimant is removed from Canada. In the most extreme cases, the entire process has taken up to 10 years. As a result of the improvements in Bill C-31, those who truly need our protection would get it even faster and those who do not would be sent home more quickly. Moreover, Bill C-31 would save Canadian taxpayers at least \$1.65 billion over five years.

It is no surprise that Bill C-31 has received widespread praise from across the country. This is what the *Globe and Mail* had to say about the bill:

[The immigration minister's] refugee reforms, aimed at making the process more efficient and decisive, are generally good. If implemented, they will improve an unwieldy asylum program...

The legislation rightly focuses on weeding out claimants who are not genuine, and stemming the flow of asylum seekers from countries such as Mexico and Hungary that are democracies with respect for basic human rights and freedoms...

Fast-tracking the refugee claims from these countries, and ensuring failed claimants are properly deported, is an excellent way to ensure Canada does not become a magnet for abuse.

Canadians are proud to have the most generous immigration system in the world. However, Canadians have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and take unfair advantage of our country. We must take action to crack down on this abuse and strengthen the integrity of Canada's immigration system. The protecting Canada's immigration system act does just that. It would make our refugee system faster and fairer. It would put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and bogus refugees abusing our generous immigration system and receiving lucrative taxpayer-funded health and social benefits. At the same time, this bill would provide protection more quickly to those who are truly in need.

Canadians have given our government a strong mandate to protect Canada's immigration system. We are acting on that mandate. If we want our refugee system to work more efficiently and to provide protection to those who genuinely need it in a reasonable amount of time, then I encourage all members of this House to vote in support of this legislation.

● (1545)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a number of lawyers gathered at a news conference and pointed out a number of flaws with this bill. I will just ask the member about one in particular, the mandatory detention for up to a year without review of those designated by the minister as irregular arrivals. We know that in the security certificate cases, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down a virtually identical provision to that clause as being unconstitutional. We simply cannot have laws made by Parliament that lock people up without review.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would care to comment on what he thinks about that part of this bill, particularly in light of the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada that very clearly says that that is unconstitutional, and which these lawyers say will absolutely be challenged as soon as this bill becomes law, if it does.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, we believe that the act meets the scrutiny of the constitutional requirements and, obviously, knowing that some people may be detained when they are irregular or illegal immigrants, we are certainly mindful of their human rights and their needs. No system is perfect, but first and foremost we must protect Canadian society by ensuring that we have an immigration system that is fair to all.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make reference to a change the government did make between Bill C-4 and Bill C-31. It acknowledged, as the opposition at the time had clearly indicated, that it would be wrong to put eight-year-olds or youth in detention centres because the minister deems them to be irregular arrivals. Under the new legislation, the government has now said it will not detain youth under the age of 16.

However, there are some really fundamental problems with Bill C-31. In this member's opinion, is the government prepared to accept amendments that would make this legislation better? One in particular is in regard to establishing an advisory committee that would allow for appointments to a board that would recommend to the minister which country should be considered a safe country.

● (1550)

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has raised a valuable point. Obviously the bill will be the subject of further debate. No one has the market cornered on good ideas. Certainly, we will welcome any improvements to the bill that may make the bill more effective and fair to Canadians and immigrants coming here.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the parliamentary secretary, and I have asked this before, about the cost of mandatory detention of people deemed to have arrived by irregular entry.

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If Australia's example is any indication, we will not be saving money. We will be spending more money than we ever spent before on the mandatory housing and internment of families and people who come here and are deemed irregular entries. Australia expects to spend \$668 million on its 19 immigration detention facilities in the next fiscal year.

Could the hon. member tell us if the government has costed this? Will there be savings or will there be significantly more tax dollars required?

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, certainly no one measure comes without costs. What is particularly important in this case is making sure that refugees and immigrants who come to Canada do so in a legitimate fashion without abusing the system.

Those who do not come here in the fashion that is anticipated by the law will be detained. Of course, there is a cost to that. Obviously there is an offset to this cost of keeping these people here. By getting them out more quickly moneys are saved. There is a trade-off. Certainly we have to put first and foremost the fairness of the system before the costs associated.

We are all immigrants to Canada and we welcome those who come here legitimately.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although I was not an MP in the previous Parliament, I know that this bill is the logical successor to Bill C-11, which was passed in the 40th parliament. I know enough about this file to say that the bill was negotiated by all parties, including the NDP.

A number of my colleagues, such as the member for Trinity—Spadina, worked very hard to ensure that the bill—which contained some of the measures included in this new bill—would be acceptable to everyone and would bring people together.

What I find fascinating is that none of the negotiated measures are found in this bill, even though they were quite acceptable to the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the member for Calgary Southeast, who said:

However, many concerns were raised in good faith by parliamentarians and others concerned about Canada's asylum system. We have, in good faith, agreed to significant amendments that reflect their input, resulting in a stronger piece of legislation that is a monumental achievement for all involved.

Am I dreaming? What has become of the “stronger piece of legislation” that the Minister spoke about? But more importantly, what has become of the good faith?

This bill is the latest manifestation of a new Conservative tradition. Ever since I have been in the House, the Conservatives have gone about things the same way. With every bill, we get the same performance. The government proposes measures and refuses to listen to anyone who does not like them or who suggests changes, as though it were sacrilegious to consider any bill to be less than perfect as of the first reading.

That kind of attitude is deplorable. It is bad for our country and for Canadians because, instead of coming up with the best possible solution for them, we have to settle for things like this.

There are ideological differences between the NDP and the government. That much is clear. The government needs to talk about something other than its “strong mandate”. The fact is that most Canadians did not choose the Conservatives. Not even a majority of voters chose them.

This government has to open its eyes and start working with the opposition parties to improve bills in ways that will benefit Canadians.

Many groups oppose this particular bill. Among those expressing their opposition are groups that the members opposite would call friends of criminals: the Barreau du Québec, the Canadian Bar Association, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. However, these groups speak with considerable authority, and I trust their opinions.

All of these groups raised the following points. First, the minister's discretionary power to designate so-called safe countries is too great. This is not about whether I trust the current minister or not. I would rather leave him in the dark about that. This is about knowing who decides which countries are on the list and about considering how the minister—the current one or his successors—will be subject to economic and diplomatic pressure to that end.

Second, a two-tier refugee system is also a problem. Some will have rights, and others will be assumed to be abusing the system. There will be no consideration for personal history.

● (1555)

What also bothers me about this bill are the potential violations of the international convention. I am sure my colleagues across the floor also received the letter from Human Rights Watch. I urge those who have not yet read it to do so.

The letter raises four points that the organization is really concerned about. First of all, the year-long mandatory detention of asylum seekers violates the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, specifically article 31, which prohibits imposing penalties on refugees simply because they had to enter a country without authorization.

Second, the five-year ban on applying for permanent resident status violates article 34 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Under that article, states must, as far as possible, facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. Human Rights Watch is also concerned about the right of separated refugee families to reunite, since obtaining permanent resident status usually takes at least six or seven years.

Third, detaining 16 and 17-year old children violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Lastly, Human Rights Watch is concerned about the power vested in the minister to designate which countries are considered safe. In short, once again, all of this will tarnish Canada's reputation on the international stage.

Canada has a reputation as a welcoming country. I have seen this first-hand as an immigrant myself. My experience as a landed immigrant was quite different from what a refugee might experience, but I simply cannot accept that people would systematically be detained because they had to flee an untenable humanitarian situation in their own country. I refuse to let Canada become a country where refugee claimants are treated so poorly that legitimate refugees could be deported before they even have a chance to learn about their rights and the system.

I do not want my country to become a place where refugee claimants will not be considered simply because the government does not want to offend some countries with which it wants to do business. And I certainly do not want to see two classes of refugees.

I strongly oppose this bill because it is harmful to refugees—people who are already vulnerable—instead of offering them a fair, balanced system that does not attack legitimate refugees.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her very eloquent speech. In my riding, Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, 14% of the population is made up of immigrants and children of immigrants. Some of these people came to Canada as refugees, others as landed immigrants. The bill, as written, seems to create a two-tier system, meaning that some refugee claims will be processed more quickly than others.

What will happen to 16- to 18-year-olds, young people who have not yet reached the age of majority? The government says that mothers and their children under 16 will be kept together in these famous centres, but what will we do with the fathers? Will they be separated from their families? How much will these famous refugee detention centres cost? There is talk of \$170 million for health insurance and other services.

• (1600)

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Clearly, this bill will cost taxpayers quite a lot of money. Yet we have a very valid system, and there are many regulations to prevent bogus refugees from entering the country, as the members across the way claim.

Certainly, this bill will impose one year of arbitrary detention without habeas corpus. Parents will be separated from their children. Spouses will be separated for years, and some people will see their permanent resident status revoked when it is deemed that they can safely return to their country of origin.

I have no answer for my colleague. She should instead ask the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism why he is again turning his back on Canadians.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague about this bill, which will mean that everyone seeking asylum in Canada will be placed in detention for nearly a year.

[English]

My concern is that we are now saying that people who arrive by irregular entry would be placed in some form of detention. We are also saying that if they do not come from a country that we recognize

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as potentially legitimate in terms of their seeking refuge, they would not be allowed in at all.

In the case of Hungary, the Federal Court of Appeal has ruled that “the evidence is overwhelming that Hungary is presently unable to provide adequate protection to its Roma citizens”.

Does my colleague believe that creating a blanket rule that certain countries are safe and certain countries are not would create a threshold that actually would keep people who need our help from being allowed to come to Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that relevant question. I have here a document I got from the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers. I would like to read what it says about the bill:

[English]

Bill C-31 gives the Minister broad and vague powers over the lives of refugees. The Minister says he will exercise those powers prudently and fairly. But the Bill also minimizes the Minister’s accountability for how he uses those powers. The Bill contains few remedies if there is an abuse of power by the Minister or his agents.

The minister tells us to trust him but that is not good enough in democracy.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in the House today and join the debate on Bill C-31.

There has been a lot of discussion over the last few hours and, frankly, over the last few days and weeks on this particular bill. There has also been a variance of opinion, so I am glad to add my voice to those who are seeking support for Bill C-31.

As, I think, everyone in this place knows, there are three distinct elements contained in Bill C-31. The first deals with the asylum system and how we can make it more responsive to refugees who make application to come to Canada. The second deals with the human smuggling aspect. The third deals with bringing in future legislation to make it mandatory for biometric data to be used when temporary resident visas are being applied for.

In the few moments I have I want to address only one element of Bill C-31, the asylum system and why we need to make that system fairer and more responsive to all those seeking to come to Canada.

I do not think there is any question that everyone in this place, with the possible exception of those independent members formerly known as the Bloc Québécois, would agree that Canada is the greatest country in the world in which to live, and there are many reasons for that.

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We have an incredibly high standard of living, which is a direct result of the economic situation in which we find ourselves. We are now the envy of the industrialized world when it comes to economic performance and economic potential. We also have a system of justice that empowers law and order that respects, preserves and promotes human rights. We have a system of government that has set up publicly funded and accessible health care for all Canadians. We have wonderful educational systems. We have systems that allow Canadians to speak without fear of persecution on any issues, whether they be political or legislative. We also have a fine system that provides social assistance to those people who genuinely need it. Besides health care, we have welfare systems and pension systems that are viable and completely sustainable. There is no question as to why citizens from across the world would want to come to Canada.

However, there are those who, rather than trying to go through the normal immigration route, are trying to cheat the system by attempting to get into Canada claiming that they are refugees or asylum seekers, that they are being persecuted by the governments in the countries from which they originated.

We have found over the last number of years that an inordinately high amount of those claims for asylum are bogus. Time after time, we have seen, particularly in cases where asylum claims have been made from people in the European Union, that those claims are without merit whatsoever.

However, they come at a cost. Under the current system, if one makes a claim for refugee status and wants to come to Canada under the asylum system that we currently have, it takes up to five and sometimes even ten years to go through the lengthy appeal process to revoke one's claim and actually remove those bogus claimants from our country. At what cost? It is estimated that bogus claims last year alone cost the Canadian taxpayer over \$170 million. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the costs associated with providing services to those bogus claimants over a five year period would cost over \$1.65 billion.

The way the system is now, if one comes to Canada claiming to be a refugee, that individual can start receiving some of those many benefits, which we offer to all of our citizens, within days. If the Immigration and Refugee Board feels that the claim for refugee status is false, the appeal system is so convoluted and so long that it may take up to 10 years to have that claimant's appeal process exhausted. Yet, all during the time that lengthy appeal process continues, those individuals are still able to receive services and benefits from the Canadian government at a cost to the Canadian taxpayer.

● (1605)

What Bill C-31 purports to do is speed up the process so that those who are making false claims get removed from Canada quicker and those who have legitimate claims to refugee status are dealt with quicker and in a more fair fashion.

The type of approach that we are taking in Bill C-31 has been applauded by members of the opposite parties, pundits and those who are involved in the immigration system because they say that it absolutely would do what it intends to do, which is to make our system of asylum and refugee claimants quicker, more responsive and fairer.

We have a system right now where people who claim to be a refugee are dealt with in a similar fashion. In other words, they need to go through an appeal process if they are initially rejected. What we are suggesting in Bill C-31 is that there would be a designation of safe countries. By that we mean that if history has proven that the majority of claimants coming from certain countries are in fact bogus then those appeal processes would be short-tracked to a 45-day period rather than the 5, 6 or 8 year period that we currently have.

That is a major change in the way we deal with refugee and asylum claimants in this country. It also would not only help save Canadian taxpayers' money but assist legitimate refugee claimants. While the appeals courts are now clogged with bogus claimants, there are legitimate refugees waiting to come to Canada who cannot be processed and accepted into our country because the system is jammed.

I think it stands to reason that all members in this place would come on side with Bill C-31. I have heard many contrary views during debate but, quite frankly, I think they are coming from a position of having misinformation, mistruths or are deliberate attempts to try to misconstrue what Bill C-31 purports to do.

Far be it from me to make accusations of any member opposite but I would suggest to all members that they carefully examine Bill C-31 because I believe it would reform the refugee system in a way that would actually benefit those who really need the protection of a government in Canada.

We know throughout the world there are many who are being persecuted right now in their home countries because of either their religious beliefs or political beliefs. Those are the types of individuals who should be allowed to make a claim to come to Canada under refugee status. Unfortunately, however, they are not the only ones who are attempting to get into our country.

Frankly, in the last number of years, over 95% of claimants who came from the European Union have either voluntarily withdrawn their claims or have returned to their country of origin. Why? They were not legitimate claims.

For example, if a country in the European Union is designated as a safe country and someone from the European Union makes an application to come to Canada as a refugee but is rejected by the Immigration and Refugee Board, he or she can appeal but the appeal process will take place within 45 days rather than 5 years or 10 years.

That is the type of system Canadian taxpayers want to see enacted here in Canada. We are the first government to come to grips with a problem we currently see on the refugee and asylum system that we inherited from previous governments. We are taking the proper steps to ensure that legitimate refugees will still have opportunities to come to our great country and do so quicker than before but also to ensure that those who are making bogus claims of refugee status are dealt with expeditiously. That is what Canadians want.

Government Orders

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it somewhat ironic, even ridiculous, that the member opposite is asking us to agree on a bill, when there was a general consensus among all members of the House on Bill C-11. Everyone made compromises and agreed on the matter. Now, the Conservatives have come back with an amalgamation of bills that are condemned by defenders of rights and freedoms in Canada. Canada's international obligations are being violated in this bill.

Among other things, in this senseless amalgamation of bills, Bill C-4 infringes on the rights of refugees, instead of helping them and dealing with smugglers. There is a lot of inconsistency in all this. I do not see where the government's good faith is with regard to amendments that might be presented. It is also turning a deaf ear to expert advice.

•(1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, the previous bill, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, was passed unanimously by the House, but as the minister clearly stated at the time, it was a good first step. Refugee reform is not static. It needs to be enhanced and updated at all times.

I would ask the member opposite who said that she feels our government is being unfair, if 95% of claimants from the European Union voluntarily withdrew their claims, what does she say about that? Are those legitimate claimants? Of course not.

It has been well documented for years and years, if not decades, that there have been bogus claimants coming to this country under our generous immigration system. Some of them not only have been bogus, but they have been criminals attempting to get into our country because we have such a generous and, quite frankly, lax immigration system.

This will tighten up the system with the reforms needed. It is not being unfair; it is just the opposite. It is a fair way to deal with immigration systems, and refugee reform is desperately needed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member is a little off base here. For example, there was a consensus, and even the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism recognized the value of having an advisory committee make recommendations as to what country should be deemed a safe country. Even the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism went out after that legislation passed and said that this is good, that it is better than what we had before.

Now this legislation reinstates what the minister originally had, which he was critical of, saying that the consensus was better than having this advisory committee recommend to the minister what is a safe country.

Does the member not see the value in going back to where there was all-party consensus, and one of the strongest advocates for that consensus was the immigration minister at that time, and reinstate that in Bill C-31? That would go a long way in showing that the government is being open-minded before the bill goes to committee.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out a couple of things.

Number one, the minister does not have arbitrary powers to designate safe countries. That designation comes from the Immigration and Refugee Board. There is a system, both qualitative and quantitative, of factors that determine what should be considered a safe country.

I would also like to point out to the hon. member opposite that his former leader, Mr. Ignatieff, stated just that, that there has to be a system to designate safe countries, because otherwise, if we do not have that kind of system, abuse in the refugee system could take place.

His former leader recognized that the designation of safe countries in a reform of the immigration and refugee system that we have in Canada was desperately needed. We agreed with him then. We agree with him now.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to speak in favour of Bill C-31.

Canadians take great pride in the generosity and compassion of our immigration system. Canadians have long opened their arms to those less fortunate and those who need our protection. Canada has welcomed over a million refugees since the Second World War and we will continue in that proud tradition.

In fact, just this past December at the United Nations in Geneva, our government committed to further concrete actions in order to provide protection to those in need. We pledge to maintain our promise to increase the number of refugees we resettle by 20%, even in the face of a global economic situation that has seen some countries reduce their resettlement. This means that by 2013, Canada will resettle up to 14,500 refugees, an increase of 2,500 refugees.

We also pledged a portion of our resettlement spaces for each of the next five years as part of an international pool for emergency situations. Canada will pledge 200 spaces each year, which represents 10% of the UNHCR's request for additional spaces for urgent crises.

In addition, our government will continue to resettle religious minorities and victims of persecution on the ground of sexual orientation, including those from Iran who have fled to Turkey. We will also continue our efforts to assist highly vulnerable persecuted populations, including traditional refugees, internally displaced persons, women and children.

Clearly, our Conservative government is committed to providing protection to the world's most vulnerable. Canadians are also committed to continuing this proud tradition of ours. The outpouring of support from Canadians under the private sponsorship refugee program underlines our generosity. Under this program, Canadian citizens and permanent residents come together to sponsor refugees and help them build a new life here in Canada.

Government Orders

Since the program began in 1978, private sponsors have collectively welcomed more than 200,000 refugees to Canada. As a result of the compassion and generosity of Canadians, our country is a world leader in resettling refugees, and our humanitarian efforts have been recognized by the United Nations.

For refugees who are resettled from outside Canada, Canada recognizes two broad classes of refugees.

The first class consists of convention refugees, which refers to those people who fall under the definition provided under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The convention defines a refugee as a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”, or unwilling to return there because there is a fear of persecution.

The second class of refugees resettled from outside Canada is the country of asylum class. This category is for people in refugee-like situations who do not qualify as convention refugees. To be considered a refugee, they must be outside their home country or the country where they normally live. They must have been and continue to be seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or have suffered massive violations of human rights, and they must not be able to find an adequate solution to their situation within a reasonable period of time.

Canada welcomes one in ten of the world's resettled refugees, more than any of the G20 countries. As I have already said, by 2013 Canada will resettle up to 14,500 refugees.

Finally, Canada also offers protection to people in Canada who fear persecution or whose removal from Canada would subject them to a danger of torture, a risk to their life, or a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

Last year alone we granted nearly 11,000 asylum seekers protection in Canada. We will continue to grant protection to those in need. Canada will continue to provide protection to those who are persecuted on the basis of race, religion, nationality, their membership in a particular group, or political opinion.

• (1620)

Members will notice that the definitions of refugees that I provided do not include queue jumpers. Nowhere does it say that protection should be offered to those people who do not want to play by the rules, those who want to jump to the front of the line, those who want to benefit from lucrative taxpayer-funded health and social benefits.

Canadians are generous and want to provide protection to those in need. However, they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity or take advantage of our country. The fact is that right now too many people are abusing our refugee system as a way to gain quick entry into Canada and jump the immigration queue.

Last year a quarter of all refugee claimants were from the European Union. Canada received more refugee claims from the European Union than from Africa and Asia. Virtually all, I repeat, virtually all of the claims from the EU were abandoned, withdrawn

or rejected. The opposition NDP and Liberals cannot dispute the facts and they cannot ignore the statistics. Bogus claimants clog our refugee system and make those who legitimately need protection wait far too long before they receive a decision on their claim.

We must also stop wasting taxpayer dollars on these unfounded claimants. There were more than 5,800 new refugee claims from EU nationals last year. The cost to Canadian taxpayers for the unfounded claims last year was nearly \$170 million. These people are not in legitimate need of our protection. Instead, they wish to manipulate our refugee system for their own selfish gain and take advantage of our country's generosity. They do not want to play by the rules or wait in line. Unfortunately, the current process rewards them for abusing the system.

Large numbers of bogus refugee claimants are a financial burden on the economy, but the attraction of Canada's social assistance programs and associated benefits is a draw for many. Under the current system, claimants can access our taxpayer-funded health care system and claim welfare for several years while their claims are still pending. Canadians want us to put a stop to this abuse. The reforms contained in Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act, are aimed at deterring abuse of Canada's immigration system. With those proposed measures, the integrity of Canada's program would be protected and we would be able to provide protection more quickly to those who generally need it.

Bill C-31 would make our refugee system fairer and faster. It would put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and bogus refugees abusing our generous immigration system and receiving lucrative taxpayer-funded health and social benefits. At the same time, this bill would provide protection more quickly to those who are truly in need. Canadians are generous and want to provide protection to those in need. These changes would maintain the quality of our asylum system and also continue our active resettlement program overseas. With these changes, Canada would remain a leader in providing refugee protection and we would be able to prevent abuse of our refugee system.

I urge my fellow members in the House to rise in support of this legislation.

• (1625)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, something has become a lot clearer for me after listening to the government today. Among many of the reasons the government is trying to dismantle Canada's social safety net is apparently to make Canada less attractive to supposed queue jumpers. This is outrageous.

I want to get back to the whole idea of bogus refugee claimants. If 95% of them are withdrawing their applications in the first place, let us deal with the remaining 5%.

Government Orders

In my riding there is a Roma community. Human Rights Watch has stated there are documented cases of racist and xenophobic violence directed particularly against the Roma and inadequate police protection in a number of EU member states. These are not bogus refugee claimants. It is a vulnerable community. They come to Canada and if they are given the right opportunities, are in the right communities and are nurtured properly, they contribute to our society and tax base.

Does the member really think that members of the Roma community are bogus refugee claimants?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting listening to NDP members. I have to say that I understand that they want to oppose. That is their role here in this Parliament. However, it is one thing to oppose constructively, it is a whole other thing to oppose to spread fear and derision throughout the country.

The member who spoke two speakers ago, and I cannot remember his riding, spoke of Human Rights Watch. Let us look at the record of Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch, by the admission of its founder, is anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, anti-American and anti-Canadian. This is an organization that the NDP members line themselves up with and take advice from. It is a shame and a disgrace.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but the hon. member is smearing organizations that are known around the world for defending human rights. I think the hon. member should be careful about what he says and stop accusing the NDP of spreading fear and being anti-Canadian.

During the last Parliament, the government accepted our amendments, but we know full well that it did so only because it had a minority. It had no choice if it wanted the bill to pass.

Now that the Conservatives have a majority and have removed the NDP amendments knowing that the bill will pass, how can they accuse us of not wanting to negotiate with them?

Can the hon. member rise today and say that the Conservatives are going to reinstate the amendments and negotiate with us? If the government decides to accept our amendments, the NDP might pass the bill.

Are the Conservatives going to negotiate with us?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I do not have to take any lessons from the NDP in terms of truth. The NDP, in this instance, has lined up with Human Rights Watch, an organization which has been declared by its founder to be anti-Semitic and have an anti-Israel bias. It has not said a word about the slaughter of Syrians by the Syrian regime. This is an organization that the NDP lines up with. The facts speak for themselves. It was the NDP that brought up Human Rights Watch, not me. The NDP members should stand by their wild accusations and be proud of them. That is fine. They can go before the Canadian people and tell them that.

I have to say that if the NDP members want amendments, and they were so happy with the bill they had before the previous Parliament

of which I was not a member, then why did they defeat the government and force an election?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's, Fisheries and Oceans; the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, Employment Insurance.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful for the opportunity to add some of my concerns about this bill which up to this point I have only been able to put forward in questions and comments. I am grateful that the Liberal Party allowed me one of the slots in their speaking roster this evening.

I have been in most of the debates on Bill C-31 since it was tabled and also in the earlier debates on its predecessor, Bill C-4. What we have been hearing from the Conservatives is that this bill is necessary to end human smuggling. We hear a lot of cries about human smuggling. We hear that people are jumping the queue. We have heard a lot of allegations.

I have structured what I hope to say in the next 10 minutes by mentioning some of the things that are most frequently alleged here and providing some counterbalance. I think there are egregious parts of this legislation. I think it violates the charter and that future courts will find it to be illegal.

Let us just start with one that we hear all the time, the notion that there is queue jumping if refugee claimants come to Canada in some fashion that is different from the way normal immigration to Canada occurs. We must keep very clear in our minds the distinct and large difference between people who come to this country as immigrants, as my parents did, and people who come to this country as political refugees, people fearing for their very lives.

In this category there is no such thing as a queue jumper. There is no such thing as going to line up at an immigration office for Canada in some country, when people know that their lives are at risk and they flee with the clothes on their back. We need to keep these things very separate in our minds. Much of this bill deals with that latter category, people who are seeking refugee status in Canada.

Some people can fear for their lives when they come to Canada and their refugee claims may be rejected. That does not mean that the adjective “bogus” applies to their claims. Some people are rejected even though they have a legitimate fear of persecution. They do not make it through our process.

We like to think that our process has been, and still is, fair and generous. However, sometimes it has rejected people who really did need our protection. Let us be clear about that.

The vast majority of refugees in this world, and they number in the millions, never make it to an industrialized country. Most of the migration that occurs among those people who are refugees is from one developing country to another. That is the vast majority of claimants.

Government Orders

We have heard that this bill, because of its punitive nature towards people who arrive by ship or some other means of arrival deemed an “irregular entry”, one of the new terms that comes up in Bill C-31, will discourage so-called human smuggling. I have yet to hear any empirical evidence that that is the case.

I have taken some time since the bill was first tabled to try to find evidence, and what I have found is the absence of evidence. An expert analyst of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Alice Edwards, said:

Pragmatically, there is no empirical evidence that the prospect of being detained deters irregular migration, or discourages persons from seeking asylum. In fact, as the detention of migrants and asylum-seekers has increased in a number of countries, the number of individuals seeking to enter such territories has also risen, or has remained constant. Globally, migration has been increasing regardless of governmental policies on detention. Except in specific individual cases, detention is generally an extremely blunt instrument of government policy-making on immigration.

Let me go to a letter that was sent to the Prime Minister of this country by a group of people in Australia who have had a lot of experience. Certainly it is true, as the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has said, that other countries are going in a similar direction. It has failed there, it will fail here. This is a letter advising the Prime Minister of Canada not to go in the direction of Australia from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Australia.

They refer to the fact that Australia is already learning some hard lessons about trying to discourage refugees by putting people in prison. Australia has abandoned its temporary protection visas because they found they were not working.

• (1635)

I will quote from their letter to our Prime Minister:

Contrary to popular belief, 'tough' immigration policies in the past have not succeeded as an effective deterrent:

In 1999, less than 1000 'unauthorised arrivals' applied for asylum, the year TPVs [temporary protection visas] were introduced.

In 2001, when the policy was in full force, the arrivals rose to more than 4000.

Under this policy, denying the right to refugees on TPVs to apply for family reunion pushed the wives and children of asylum seekers onto boats in an attempt to be reunited.

In 2001 353 people drowned in the tragic SIEVX disaster while travelling by boat to Australia.

Most of the 288 women and children aboard the SIEVX were family members of TPV holders already in Australia.

We have also been told that bringing in this bill would save money because people would be discouraged from coming here and our social safety net programs would not be available to refugees. I have asked several times in the House and I have yet to have one Conservative member of Parliament offer up a cost of this legislation. As far as I can find, it has not been costed.

Anyone, men, women, and children over 16 years of age, coming here by irregular entry would be put in detention. Minor children would likely be placed in detention as well because they would opt to stay with the mother rather than be placed far from their families in a foreign land.

Let us see what it has cost Australia. Australia maintains 19 immigration detention facilities. In the last year for which I could find costs, 2011, it was spending over \$668 million on refugee

detention. The Australian secretary in the department of immigration and citizenship remarked, and I do not know when we will hear this from the Canadian Minister of Citizenship, that “The cost of long-term detention and the case against the current system are compelling.... The cost to the taxpayer of detention is massive and the debt recovery virtually non-existent”.

We have heard that children would no longer be jailed, unlike the previous version of this legislation Bill C-4. We have been told that the change would allow children to go somewhere else, but we have not been told where. Under the international Convention on the Rights of the Child these children are defined as legally children. Sixteen to eighteen year olds would be jailed, their parents would be jailed, everyone would go to jail for up to a year if they arrived by irregular entry.

I just want to share what Australia has started doing. The Australian Human Rights Commission found that detention actually violated the Australian human rights provisions. It also was not working. In October 2010 the Australian government changed its tactics. It decided that it would begin to move a significant number of families with children into community detention. In other words, the Australian government is keeping track of anyone who arrives by irregular entry. These people are not essentially integrated into the community in the same way that they would be if they were allowed to work or move around freely. This community detention process has reduced costs. Placement in communities bridges visas and is essentially community detention but requires that the people involved report to someone, similar to parole, but they actually live in communities.

Lastly, we have been told that the bill would deal with people coming from the European Union. We have also been told that there is no reason for anyone to worry about the European Union. Since the bill was tabled, a Federal Court decision was tabled on February 22, 2012, in the case of *Hercegi v. Canada*. Mr. Justice Hughes of the Federal Court said clearly, “The evidence is overwhelming that Hungary is unable presently to provide adequate protection to its Roma citizens”.

I have one last court decision to refer to and that is *Charkaoui v. Canada*, 2007 in the Supreme Court of Canada. Madam Justice McLaughlin ruled that charter rights extend to foreign nationals. Charter violations are endemic to this act.

We must change this legislation in order to not violate Canadian values, Canadian law and the charter.

• (1640)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. I am deeply concerned about the pattern I see from the Conservatives. They are talking about people who come here as refugees as illegal immigrants, as though they are all criminal, they are all guilty, they are all up to something and so they need to be locked up, handled and separated.

Government Orders

We see the movement in Europe where families with children are put into detention centres, basically, prison camps for children. My hon. colleagues talked about the situation in Australia, where families fleeing from dangerous situations are treated as criminals and are put into detention centres, without any sort of due course regarding a fair review of what their situation is, whether they have proper refugee status or whether they do not deserve to be there.

Is my hon. colleague concerned about this ideological attack that seems to be so much in keeping with so many of the other countries that we see going down this same road?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, this does seem to be legislation that has been designed with an eye to public relations. I am a British Columbian. I know the effect of the *Sun Sea* coming to our shores. There was a lot of concern that people would be arriving. The first thing we heard from the Conservative members was that there could be terrorists on board this ship. In the end, having screened the many people who had gone through the miserable experience of a voyage on an unsafe and rusty vessel across the waves to Canada who were then detained and who were screened carefully without use of this law, the vessel was not found to contain criminals and terrorists.

We have not had a lot of boats arriving since. Therefore, the legislation seems to me to be intended to be largely public relations.

There is a refugee issue and an immigration issue. We need to replace the dwindling numbers of people on the Immigration Refugee Board so claims can be handled more swiftly and families can be reunited in this country.

• (1645)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, listened with interest to my colleague's comments. The unfortunate part of many of the comments that have been made today is the rhetoric that is involved. She used the term "jail". My colleague across the way used the terms, "prison camps" and "treated as criminals". Nothing could be further from the truth. We are simply trying to identify the identity of the persons who are coming here.

Does she not agree that it is important we know whether those who come here to seek the protection of Canada are in fact terrorists or have been involved in criminal activity in their country of origin? Is that too much to ask for the safety of Canadians?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Kitchener—Conestoga to be a person of faith and compassion. I ask him to consider that these may in fact be jails. We do not yet have detention centres. Some of the people from the *Sun Sea* were placed in jails. That is a fact. Therefore, how are we going to deal with numbers of people?

I agree with the point entirely. We need to know who is coming to our shore. We need to identify them. Those things can be done without a blanket presumption.

For instance, the way this legislation would work is if people come by ship, they are automatically detained. If they arrive in an airport, they are not. I do not understand why it is that we assume that only the dangerous people come by ships. If they come to a crossing by car and say that they are political refugees, their treatment is different.

The government, in its legislation, has not provided consistency in the way in which these streams of political refugees are to be treated.

I can only see it as a public relations ploy to start by saying that if people come by ship, they will be deemed an irregular entry. If we do not call it prison, if we do not call it jail, if we do not call it internment, the detention facilities in this legislation could well end up being the county jail.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act.

I am proud to be part of a government that is effectively balancing ensuring that we offer protection for legitimate asylum seekers with maintaining the integrity of our immigration system and our security, all while ensuring that we build an immigration system that allows those who seek to come to Canada to contribute to the economic needs of our country and allowing them to be welcomed here more expeditiously. That is all thanks to the vision and dedication of the hon. Minister of Immigration, who I am proud to stand alongside today.

Canada already has the most fair and generous immigration system in the world. Canada welcomes more resettled refugees than almost any other country in the world.

However, in order for our asylum system to continue to be generous and to work effectively, Canadians need to know that it is not vulnerable to abuse. Unfortunately, for far too long, our immigration system has been open to abuse by those who do not want to follow the rules, or do not want to wait in line like everyone else, but would rather use the asylum system as a back door to jump the queue. This abuse undermines Canadians' faith in our immigration system. It costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars every year and, most unfortunate, it means that genuine refugees who need asylum are waiting far too long for Canada's protection.

Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to protect Canada's immigration system. They have told us loud and clear that they want us to put a stop to this abuse. With Bill C-31, we are acting on that mandate.

Bill C-31 would make important and further much needed improvements to our asylum system. It includes provisions to crack down on the despicable crime of human smuggling and it provides the government with the authority to require biometric data for anyone seeking temporary status in Canada. Together, these improvements would make Canada's immigration system faster and fairer.

Government Orders

Today I am going to focus my remarks on the refugee reform provisions of Bill C-31. The Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which was passed recently, was a good start and included much needed reform to Canada's broken asylum system. However, our government has always been clear that refugee reform is not a static issue and further steps would be taken if and when required. Recent waves of bogus refugee asylum claims from the democratic and human rights respecting European Union have made it clear that further reforms to Canada's asylum system are needed and needed urgently.

The statistics speak volumes. Last year, Canada received 5,800 refugee claimants from the European Union, which represents a 14% increase from the year before. This means that claims from the European Union made up a quarter of all claims. This is more than the number of claims received from Africa or Asia.

Last year, the top source country for refugees was Hungary, a member of the European Union. It is very telling when we look at the global distribution of refugee claims made by Hungarian nationals. In 2010, 2,400 refugee claims were made by Hungarian nationals. One hundred of them were made to other countries outside of Canada, while a whopping 2,300 were made in Canada. That means Canada received 23 times more claims from Hungary than all the other countries in the world combined. Although these claimants have access to 26 countries in which they can move, work and live, they are choosing Canada and they are choosing Canada for a reason.

Appallingly, bogus claims from the European Union last year cost Canadian taxpayers \$170 million. What is more, in the last few years virtually all refugee claims from the European Union were withdrawn, abandoned by the claimants themselves, or rejected by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board.

● (1650)

Our government is acting responsibly and in the best interest of Canadian taxpayers by introducing reforms to address the increasing number of bogus refugee claimants. These bogus claimants, many of whom withdraw or abandon their own claims, seek to abuse Canada's generous asylum system and receive generous social benefits, like welfare and health care, costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

One of the central features of Bill C-31 is the ability of the government to designate countries that generally do not produce refugees and process their claims more quickly. Under Bill C-31, the factors that would lead a country to be designated would be clearly outlined in both law and in regulation. The most important factors are objective and quantitative and refer to the actual acceptance rate of claims from a given country. This means that the designation of a country as safe would be based on the results of decisions taken by asylum claimants themselves, such as the decision to withdraw or abandon their claims, and by the decisions rendered by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board and not by the minister.

In addition, unlike the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which had quantitative and qualitative criteria specified only in regulation, this proposed legislation has qualitative factors enshrined in legislation, while the quantitative factors would be set out in ministerial order. In this way, the criteria used to trigger a country for review for

designation would be even more transparent and accountable than under the Balanced Refugee Reform Act.

Under Bill C-31, claimants from safe countries would have their cases heard on an expedited basis. More specifically, the independent IRB would hear their case in 45 days instead of the more than 1,000 days that it takes now.

It is important to emphasize that under Bill C-31, every eligible refugee claimant, regardless from which country they came, would continue to receive a hearing from the independent IRB. Furthermore, as is the case now, all refugee claimants, including those from designated countries, would be able to make an application for review of a negative decision by the federal court. Bill C-31 actually adds appeal rights by creating the refugee appeal division to which the vast majority of failed claimants would also have access.

I also note that with Bill C-31, Canada would continue to exceed its international and domestic obligations. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the 1951 UN Refugee Convention require that all refugee claimants be given the opportunity to have their claim heard. The process in Canada goes above and beyond its domestic and international obligations and that would not change under Bill C-31.

Canada has and will continue to have one of the most generous refugee systems in the world. All refugee claimants will continue to have their case heard by the independent IRB. Furthermore, every failed refugee claimant will continue to have access to at least one level of appeal. People deemed in need of protection will not be returned to their country of persecution regardless of what country they have fled. In fact, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has recognized the validity of providing expedited processing for refugee claimants from designated countries of origin. António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said:

—there are indeed safe countries of origin. There are indeed countries in which there is a presumption that refugee claims will probably be not as strong as in other countries.

He also stated that as long as all refugee claimants had access to the system, it was completely legitimate to accelerate some claims.

Former Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, also recognized the legitimacy of designating certain countries as safe and even advocated rejecting all claims from those countries, which Bill C-31 does not propose to do. Furthermore, many democratic European countries already designate certain countries as safe and accelerate asylum procedures for those claims from those countries, including the U.K., France, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands and Ireland among others.

Government Orders

Canadians are proud of their welcoming and compassionate nature, but Canadians also have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and take unfair advantage of our country. Bill C-31 would prevent bogus refugees from abusing our system and receiving lucrative taxpayer-funded health and social benefits. At the same time, it would provide protection more quickly to genuine refugees who are truly in need.

• (1655)

We need to send a clear message to those who seek to abuse our system that if they are not genuinely in need of protection, they will be sent home quickly. At the same time we can ensure that those who truly need our help will get it even faster.

I urge all members of the House to support this important bill and ensure its timely passage.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to point out that the NDP strongly opposes Bill C-31, because it punishes refugees instead of providing them with a fast, equitable system. In addition, the bill concentrates more power in the hands of the minister by allowing him to designate safe countries and restrict the number of refugees from those countries. The problem with this bill is that, under the current Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the minister can make exceptions to safe country designations to exclude LGBT individuals, who suffer a great deal of persecution in their countries, which are considered unsafe.

My question for the Conservative member is this: will the Conservative members do the right thing and amend Bill C-31 to ensure that LGBT groups can live safely and immigrate easily to Canada as refugees?

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I note that in some of the hon. member's comments there were some very misleading statements.

I would argue that it is certainly much fairer to those who seek to come here as refugees to know that they will have their claims processed much more quickly. By ensuring that we are able to eliminate the bogus claims from our system more quickly, we will also be able to be fairer to those who come here and genuinely need our assistance.

I would also point out regarding the decision to hear the cases of those who are coming here from the listed countries, they will make their cases in 45 days rather than a thousand days. I would argue that is much fairer than what currently exists.

I would also note regarding the second point made by the member that the changes we are looking to make actually enshrine in legislation some of the objective and quantitative measures to ensure that those decisions are based on actual decisions of the claimants themselves or decisions rendered by the IRB rather than some arbitrary decision of the minister.

I think the member's claims are completely false.

• (1700)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first member of the Conservative Party who has said

that the former leader of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff, supports the safe country list and who then tries to give the impression that somehow our former leader might have supported Bill C-31.

First and foremost, let us make it very clear that the former leader of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff, would not support Bill C-31. The Liberal Party does not support Bill C-31.

The truth of the matter is that Michael Ignatieff supported the concept of the safe country list, but so did the leader of the Conservative Party, our current Prime Minister, when the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism first brought that in with a consensus that there be an advisory group that would decide which countries would go onto the safe country list.

Why are the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and the member not supporting Michael Ignatieff and the Prime Minister when the latter agreed to an all-party supported proposal that would have seen an advisory committee decide on countries to be included in the safe country list as opposed to just this particular Minister of Immigration having that authority?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is very unfortunate the Liberal Party is choosing not to support legislation like this, legislation that is very balanced and fair and seeks to ensure that we provide protection for those who are genuinely in need of our protection in a quicker and more expeditious fashion, while also saving the taxpayers of Canada hundreds of millions of dollars by ensuring that we do not have to deal with bogus claims from countries we should not be dealing with.

It is really unfortunate that they will not support legislation that is balanced and fair and in the best interests of Canadian taxpayers. I would like to read the actual quote from former Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff:

I want a legitimate, lawful refugee system that, to get to the openness point, welcomes refugees...and then says, look there are a number of countries in the world in which we cannot accept a bona fide refugee claim because you don't have cause, you don't have just cause coming from those countries.

Otherwise, he said, we will have refugee fraud and no one wants that.

Finally, I will just point out that designation of these countries as safe countries will be based on the results of decisions by asylum claimants themselves to withdraw their claims or by decisions rendered by IRB, not by the minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before I begin talking about such an important matter as the status of refugees, I would like to say that it is good to be able to rise in the House and speak to one of this government's bills. Given the number of times that the Conservatives have invoked closure since the beginning of this parliament, Bloc Québécois members, and those of the other opposition parties, have been muzzled on too many issues affecting the interests and values of Quebec and Canadians. I am disappointed, but not surprised, because standing up for democracy is not the Conservatives' strong suit. Come to think of it, I find it difficult to come up with one area where they excel.

Government Orders

The bill we are debating touches on two aspects of my introduction that might seem to be off topic: Quebec values and the Conservatives' lack of regard for democracy. I said Quebec values, but I will correct myself. They are actually universal values.

Bill C-31, which we are debating today, takes a dim view of refugees, treating them like a burden and a potential threat. Nowhere in this document do we see the real will to help these people who have experienced real tragedy. According to the minister, they take advantage of our welcome and cost Canadians too much money.

While defending his bill, the minister said the following in February:

There is a whole narrative in the community about how they can come to Canada and benefit from social welfare and all kinds of other social programs, health insurance...

For too long, we have spent precious time and taxpayers' money on people who are not in need of our protection, at the expense of legitimate asylum seekers...

This smacks of avarice and prejudice.

This is how the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism explained and defended his Bill C-31 in the House on March 6:

Canadians are worried when they see large human smuggling operations, for example, the two large ships that arrived on Canada's west coast in the past two years with hundreds of passengers, illegal migrants who paid criminal networks to be brought to Canada in an illegal and very dangerous manner.

Canadians are also worried when they see a large number of false refugee claimants who do not need Canada's protection, but who file refugee claims because they see an opportunity in Canada's current refugee system to stay in Canada permanently and have access to social benefits...our country's protection.

Canadians are really worried about this, for crying out loud. If you want my opinion, this Conservative government is giving Canadians every reason to worry. They like it when people are worried because then they can justify military spending, trampling on people's rights and forcing the provinces to build jails. But this is about refugees, people who come here with nothing but their distress and desperation, not the economic immigrants who show up with half a million dollars. We are talking about people who are willing to risk their lives for a fresh start in Canada or Quebec.

In an attempt to justify his bill, the minister would have us believe that bogus refugees are flooding into Canada, that foreigners have figured out how to work the system; they pass themselves off as refugees so that they can take advantage of Canada's health insurance and social assistance systems. You would have to be awfully mean-spirited and ideological to say such crazy things. They are using exceptional cases to give themselves arbitrary powers that will have a direct impact on the lives of desperate people.

A document published in 2001 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees states the following:

Unlike migrants, refugees do not *choose* to leave their countries; they are forced to do so. Economic migrants are persons who leave their countries of origin purely for economic reasons, to seek material improvements in their lives. The key difference between economic migrants and refugees is that economic migrants enjoy the protection of their home countries; refugees do not.

Bill C-31 fails to recognize the spirit of the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees:

Considering that the United Nations has, on various occasions, manifested its profound concern for refugees and endeavoured to assure refugees the widest possible exercise of these fundamental rights and freedoms...

Where is that concern now? Where in Bill C-31 is the desire to assure those fundamental rights? They evaporated the moment the Conservatives got their majority. Gone, just like that.

• (1705)

There was Bill C-11, which was passed unanimously by this House. In a speech he gave on June 29, 2010, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism spoke glowingly about Bill C-11, and I quote:

Let me just close by once more thanking my colleagues in the opposition, my critics in particular who worked together with me in a remarkable act of cross-partisan collaboration to get things done for Canadians. As a result of their work we are seeing today what I think is a minor miracle. I came to this place three months ago to launch our Balanced Refugee Reform Act. We said at the time that we would listen to constructive ideas about how to improve the bill.

We did listen. We did consult. We had a remarkable cross-party consensus in the House of Commons and today in the Senate that will lead to a much better refugee system for Canada, a faster and fairer system, a system that provides enhanced procedural fairness for refugee claimants...

Now, out of partisanship and mean-spiritedness, the minister is throwing out Bill C-11, that minor miracle. Bill C-31 not only spoils the balance Bill C-11 achieved in terms of the procedure that should apply to refugee claimants, but it takes the Conservatives' twisted logic even further: it attacks the victims of human smugglers instead of the smugglers themselves by creating a subclass of refugees.

It is clear to the Bloc Québécois that the Conservatives are using Bill C-31 to send a message to people around the world who are persecuted that Canada no longer wants them. Frankly, this is disappointing.

I said at the beginning of my speech that standing up for democracy was not a Conservative value. This government is quite willing to stand up for the free market and rich oil companies, but standing up for people who are suffering, people who risk torture or death, people who do not think what the government would have them think, is the least of its concerns.

Bill C-31 reflects the government's desire to exercise power without sharing, even if it means destroying the consensus that was Bill C-11, because the opposition parties had a hand in it.

Bill C-31 exemplifies this government's lack of compassion. With Bill C-31, this government will definitely further tarnish the image that Canada and Quebec have built as a welcoming country and a safe haven for those who need it most. It is simply shameful.

Government Orders

• (1710)

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, twice now, the government in power has expressed a certain viewpoint that really worries me. The Conservatives seem to be suggesting that legitimate claimants should be refused in order to see if they appeal the decision, to see if their claim was actually sincere. That is as absurd as saying that an organization should be refused a subsidy, because if it really needs it, then it will apply again next year. Before hearing that logic, I had no idea just how far the members across the floor were willing to go.

Does my colleague share any of my concerns about what seems to be a new form of immigration management?

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Indeed, there is a certain logic in this bill—a Conservative logic. It is a logic of distrust, a logic of fear, a logic that serves only Conservative interests. The more fear and doubt the Conservatives spread, the more vulnerable people will feel. The Conservatives want people to be afraid of anyone who is different, to believe that they are dangerous. We believe that treating people this way goes against the spirit of what we should be offering refugees who seek asylum in very particular circumstances and who deserve all our attention, rather than our distrust and rejection.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier I asked the Conservative member for Wild Rose a question on the status of LGBT refugees and the fact that Bill C-31 would close Canada's doors to those refugees depending on the security status of their country. Yet, the Conservative member did not even mention the LGBT acronym, nor the terms “gay”, “lesbian”, “bisexual” or “transgender”.

I would like to ask my colleague from the Bloc whether he is also concerned about the Conservative policy that will make it difficult for people who are persecuted, who are receiving death threats and who are at risk of being killed in their country, to access Canada as refugees. Under this bill, those people are going to come up against closed doors in Canada.

• (1715)

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for his question.

Indeed, gay, lesbian and transgendered refugees have good reason to be concerned given the fact that this bill is a form of profiling.

The Conservatives' profiling could end up making one category of refugees eligible and sidelining another that might not correspond to Conservative values. There is good reason to believe that people will be treated differently depending on where they come from, but also depending on their sexual orientation and positions they may have held in the past.

[*English*]

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the speeches from the other side, I truly believe there is a great misunderstanding of what a refugee is and how a refugee should be treated. I would stress the fact that

Canada does more than its share in the international community to help those who need help.

We are talking about people here who arrive in this country, make false claims, clog up the system and delay the claims of those who need our help.

Why would the member opposite not support a bill that would benefit those refugees who are stranded in refugee camps around the world and who are under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for his question.

It is simple: the Conservatives have their own definition of what makes a good refugee. They add a criterion.

There is no such thing as a good refugee or a bad refugee. There are refugees. Refugee status was clearly defined by the UN in 1951.

I think that the Conservatives have a way of coming up with what is good and what is not. The purpose of their bill is not to help refugees, but to define what they think makes a good refugee or a bad refugee.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the frustration the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville has with an answer like that. I heard the member opposite say that there was no such thing as a good or bad refugee, that they are just refugees. There really are legitimate refugees but there are others who are trying to abuse the system. The opposition does not seem to be able to comprehend or understand that.

We are here today to talk about Bill C-31 in order to deal with some of those issues. The title of the bill is protecting Canada's immigration system act, and that is what it would do.

Canada has the most fair and generous immigration system in the world. We welcome more resettled refugees than almost any other country in the world. That number is growing by an additional 2,500 because our government is increasing it by 20%, to a total number of 14,500 resettled refugees to Canada.

However, in order for our asylum system to continue to be generous, Canadians need to know that it is not vulnerable to abuse. That is something that the opposition does not seem to understand. For far too long, our immigration system has been open to abuse by those who do not want to follow the rules or wait in line like everyone else and would rather use the asylum system as a back door to queue jump. This abuse undermines Canadians' faith in our immigration system. It cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars a year and, most unfortunately, it means that genuine refugees who need asylum, who the opposition claims to have some concern for, are waiting far too long for Canadian protection.

Government Orders

Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to protect Canada's immigration system. They told us loud and clear across the country that they want to put a stop to this abuse. With Bill C-31, we are acting on that mandate. Bill C-31 would make important, much needed improvements to our asylum system. It includes provisions to crack down on the despicable crime of human smuggling and provides the government with the authority to require biometric data for anyone seeking temporary status in Canada. Together, these improvements would make Canada's immigration system faster and fairer.

Today I will focus my remarks on the refugee reform provisions of Bill C-31. The Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which passed in 2012, was a good start. It included many needed reforms to Canada's broken asylum system. However, our government has always been clear that refugee reform is not a static issue and that further steps will be taken when and if required. The recent waves of bogus refugee asylum claimants from the democratic and human rights respecting European Union have made it clear that further reforms to our asylum system are needed urgently.

The statistics speak volumes. Last year, Canada received 5,800 from the European Union, which represents a 14% increase from the year before. This means that claims from the European Union made up a quarter of all claims, which is more than the claims received from Africa or Asia.

The top source country for refugees last year was Hungary, a member of the European Union. It is very telling when we look at the global distribution of refugee claims made by Hungarian nationals. In 2010, 2,400 refugee claims were made by Hungarian nationals, 100 of them were made outside of Canada, while a whopping 2,300 were made in Canada. That means that Canada received 23 times the claims than any other country. Although these claimants have access to 26 European countries in which they can work, move and live, they are choosing Canada. We actually had even more than that in 2011 when it came close to 4,000 individuals. They are choosing Canada for a reason.

However, this is very expensive for Canadian taxpayers. Bogus claims from the EU last year cost Canadian taxpayers \$170 million. What is more, in the last few years virtually all refugee claims from the European Union were withdrawn, abandoned by the claimants themselves or rejected by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board.

Our government is acting responsibly and in the best interests of Canadian taxpayers by introducing reforms to address the increasing number of bogus refugee claimants. Many of the bogus claimants who withdraw or abandon their own claims seek to abuse Canada's generous asylum system and receive generous social benefits like welfare and health care, which costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

• (1720)

One of the central features of Bill C-31 is the ability of the government to designate countries that generally do not produce refugees and then to process those claims more quickly.

Under Bill C-31, the factors that would lead a country to be designated would be clearly outlined in both the law and in the

regulations. The most important factors are objective and quantitative and refer to the actual acceptance rate claims from a given country. This means the designation of a country as safe would be based on the results of decisions taken by asylum claimants themselves, such as the decision to withdraw or abandon their claims, and the decisions rendered by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board, not the minister.

In addition, unlike the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which had quantitative and qualitative criteria specified only in regulation, we believe that in this proposed legislation it is important that the qualitative factors be enshrined in legislation, while the quantitative factors would be set by ministerial order. In this way, the criteria used to trigger a country for review for designation would be more transparent and accountable than they were even under the Balanced Refugee Reform Act.

Under Bill C-31, claimants from safe countries would have their cases heard on an expedited basis. More specifically, the independent IRB would hear their case in 45 days instead of the more than 1,000 days it takes now.

It is important to emphasize that under Bill C-31 every eligible refugee claimant, regardless of which country they come from, would continue to receive a hearing before the independent Immigration and Refugee Board.

Furthermore, as is the case now, all refugee claimants, including those from designated countries, would be able to make an application for review of a negative decision by the Federal Court. Bill C-31 actually adds appeal rights by creating the refugee appeal division to which the vast majority of failed claimants would have access. Multiple levels of appeals seems to be very fair.

I would also note that in Bill C-31 Canada would continue to exceed its international and domestic obligations. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as the 1951 UN refugee convention, require that all refugee claimants be given the opportunity to have their claim heard. The process in Canada goes above and beyond its domestic and international obligations, and that will not change under Bill C-31.

Canada has and will continue to have one of the most generous refugee systems in the world. All refugee claimants will continue to have their cases heard by the independent IRB. Furthermore, every failed refugee claimant will continue to have access to at least one level of appeal. People deemed in need of protection will not be returned to their country of persecution regardless of which country they have fled.

Government Orders

In fact, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recognized the validity of providing expedited processing for refugee claimants from designated countries of origin. Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, has said, “there are indeed safe countries of origin. There are indeed countries in which there is a presumption that refugee claims will probably be not as strong as in other countries”. He also stated that as long as all refugee claimants have access to the system, it is completely legitimate to accelerate those claims.

Former Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, has also recognized the legitimacy of designating certain countries as safe. My colleague who just spoke talked about that. He recognized the legitimacy of designating certain countries as safe and even advocated rejecting all claims from those countries, which Bill C-31 does not propose to do. He said, “I want a legitimate, lawful refugee system that, to get to the openness point, welcomes genuine refugees ... and then says, look there are a number of countries in the world in which we cannot accept a bona fide refugee claim because you don't have cause, you don't have just cause coming from those countries. Otherwise you'll have refugee fraud, and nobody wants that. Furthermore, many democratic European countries already designate certain countries as safe and accelerate asylum procedures for claims from those countries”.

Canadians are very proud of their welcoming and compassionate nature but they have little tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and take unfair advantage of our country. Bill C-31 would prevent bogus refugees from abusing our system and receiving lucrative tax funded health and social benefits. At the same time, it would provide protection more quickly to genuine refugees who are truly in need.

I urge all members of this House to support this important bill and ensure its timely passage.

• (1725)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course the UN convention on refugees, which Canada is signatory to, does require every signatory to provide an initial assessment of every refugee claim. Therefore, Canada, in doing that, is doing nothing more than meeting its international obligations.

One of the major criticisms by many of this bill is that those who come from designated safe countries would not have access to an appeal to the refugee appeal division, whereas people who come from countries that are not so designated would. This would create a two tiered appeals system.

In the previous Parliament, all parties in this House, including the government side, the Conservatives, agreed that that was not fair. In the previous incarnation of this bill, the government agreed that all claimants should have access to the refugee appeal division because there could be mistakes made at first instance.

We all agree that we need a quick and efficient system but the New Democrats say that we could have an efficient system that is also fair.

Why would the member and his government put forward a bill that has a two tiered appeals system? Canadians would never accept

that their neighbour can appeal to the court of appeal but they cannot depending on where they come from.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it is pretty clear that this bill achieves the balance Canadians would like to see. It has a number of factors in it and the issue the member opposite is speaking about is part of that. It talks about the importance of dealing with human smuggling and the importance of reforms to our asylum system. The NDP would have to admit there are people who file bogus refugee claims to try to get into our country and to access the generous benefits that we have in this country. I find it interesting that the member opposite is standing, but earlier today we were talking about his participation in rallies with organizations that do not recognize there are any bogus refugee claimants in this country. We all know that there are. We are trying to deal with that. We are trying to make it fair for honest refugees and for Canadians as well.

• (1730)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to be aware of the fact that from what I understand, all political parties inside the chamber support the idea of having a designated safe countries list. The difference is that the Conservatives have done a double flip-flop on it. Originally, they did not want the minister to establish an advisory group so they made their first flip. They said it made sense, that there would be an advisory committee that would recommend to the minister which countries should be on the safe country list. Now the Conservatives have done another flip-flop saying they have changed their minds on this legislation and now they are going back to that it should be the minister who decides. Whether it was Michael Ignatieff or other Liberals, NDP, Conservatives at one time, they supported the other way.

Will the minister acknowledge the need to do yet another flip-flop and agree to an amendment that would reinstate the advisory committee?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems with the Liberals is often when they are offered something from us and we have said let us work together, they say that they do not want to do that, that they are not going to co-operate with us. Then they come back later and say they wanted the deal even though they did not want to support it. We have seen that with legislation. Often they will come back and criticize legislation that they oppose and criticize positions that we have taken.

Just before the March break, there was another example of that with the eco-energy bill, a bill which both the Liberals and the NDP have opposed strenuously. At every point they have voted against it. Then they asked us to put it back in. This is one more example of that. Lots of people have said that this legislation is necessary. I could read some of those comments. The *Globe and Mail* said that the immigration minister's “refugee reforms, aimed at making the process more efficient and decisive, are generally good. If implemented, they will improve an unwieldy asylum program”.

There are pages of comments from people who have come forward and said this is important legislation and that we need to pass it.

Government Orders

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to confirm what the member for Winnipeg North said. All of us in this House want to provide improved safety and treatment of refugees as they come to Canada.

Has the government provided any costing for the detention of refugees who are deemed irregular entry? Do we know what this bill will cost?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, we clearly know what it costs now. If the member was listening to my speech, she would have those numbers because it costs hundreds of millions of dollars each year for us not to deal with bogus refugees.

I want to talk about the fact that immigration has changed my own riding. It is a rural riding in southwestern Saskatchewan. People would think perhaps that we have not had a lot of immigration, as we did 100 years ago when the land was settled by people who came from around the world. However, over the last few years Saskatchewan has had a tremendous influx of immigrants. They have changed our communities in very special and good ways.

We want to see claimants who have immigrated honestly from other countries. We do not want to see people jumping the queue and taking their place. We welcome folks from around the world.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this punish refugees and give a break to smugglers bill. Why do I say that? Even though this bill is supposed to go after smugglers, the people who would be hurt are the genuine refugees.

Two weekends ago we celebrated St. Patrick's Day. I was thinking about the Irish refugees who came to the shores of Toronto. At the turn of the century, over 50,000 Irish refugees arrived on the shores of what was the city of York, before it was called Toronto. At that time, the city of York had only 30,000 residents.

How did the Irish refugees arrive? By irregular means, by boats. Did they have any identification with them? Most likely not. Should they have been locked up? Under this law, if passed, I suppose they would have been locked up for at least a year.

Members can imagine refugees coming to the shores of a big country, to a city that does not have a lot of people, and being locked up for a year. A lot of them were sick. Who would have been able to help them? At the time, the medical officer of health risked his life to serve the Irish immigrants. In fact, a doctor lost his life due to a fever. What was shown to the Irish refugees was compassion and support. As a result, they built Toronto. They helped build Canada. Some of their descendants might even be in the House of Commons.

Had they been locked up, they would not have been able to work or support their families. Under the law that is in front of us, they would not have been able to sponsor their family members to bring them here. They would have been separated from their families for at least 10 years. Because they would have been locked up, they would not have been able to work. After they were released, assuming they were genuine refugees, they still would not have been able to become permanent residents for a long period of time. They would have been prevented from sponsoring their family members. Even after they had become permanent residents, their status could still have been revoked. What kind of stability would their lives have had? None whatsoever.

At the time, if Ireland had been seen as a safe country, many of those refugees would have been sent home.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' recommendation indicates that some countries are safer than others, but we have to determine each refugee's claim based on the person's circumstances. Some countries are considered safe countries, so to speak, but not for gay, lesbian and bisexual people. They could be gay bashed or killed.

How does one declare a country as safe? The previous law said that there would be an advisory committee made up of a team of experts who would advise the minister. This bill just got rid of that. The minister does not need any expert advice. He can just declare a country as safe and the people from that country would be fast-tracked for deportation in no time, without right of appeal to the Federal Court, and no humanitarian or compassionate consideration. They could attempt an appeal, but it would not stop them from being deported. That means individual refugees would not be treated equally under the law.

● (1735)

In Canada we have a fundamental belief that each case must be considered equally under the law. The bill would completely change that. It would treat refugee A completely differently from refugee B depending upon the person's country of origin. However, let us assume it is a gay man from a country such as Ghana or Jamaica. One could say that Jamaica is a safe country, yet people can be killed because of their sexual orientation.

The bill has a lot of flaws. I do not understand why the bill is necessary. Less than a year ago, all parties in the House of Commons worked with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and came up with a package called the balanced refugee reform act. At that time, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration said that he was very proud of the bill because it had all-party support, was balanced and fair.

What has changed in the last eight or nine months? Nothing. Why is a bill that was balanced and fair all of a sudden no longer balanced and fair? Nothing has changed.

In fact, with regard to that bill, Bill C-11, the balanced refugee reform act, the immigration minister came to the committee and said, "This is such a fine bill. It will take us at a least a year to implement the bill. Give us one year and we will make the system perfect." That is what was promised last June. It is not June 2012 yet. A year has not passed and the bill has not been implemented. The minister obviously has not had the time to implement the bill, and yet this so-called fast, balanced and fair bill all of a sudden became a big problem, and here we are debating another bill.

Government Orders

Think of the amount of money and time that has been wasted. A huge number of witnesses came to committee. There were forums in cities across the country. The immigration committee listened to all types of expert advice. All of that is gone. It is completely changed. The bill in front of us looks completely different. It is quite astounding. I cannot see what has changed in one year. The previous bill has not even been implemented and yet we are here wasting time and money debating a new bill.

What is the root problem? Why do we have such a backlog? Why does it take so long to determine a refugee claim?

Prior to 2006, the wait was one or two years. Things were going along and there were no huge problems. When the Conservatives came into power, they did not appoint any Immigration and Refugee Board members. As a result, for two or three years hardly any cases were being determined. A huge backlog was created because the Conservative minister did not appoint any IRB members.

It is the implementation of the law that is the problem. The law is not the problem.

On top of that, the CBSA said that it had difficulty deporting people because it does not have the right computer system. This is according to the Auditor General and admitted by the CBSA.

The real problem is the implementation of the law. There is no need to change the law. That is why members should not support this bill.

It is a very complex bill. I wish I had more time to address every element of it.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member.

The member who spoke before her talked of bogus refugees. I find that shameful. A refugee is first of all a person. They are a refugee no matter what their reason for leaving their country, perhaps on ethnic or religious grounds, or to obtain protection because they are lesbian, gay, transgendered or transsexual. A refugee is a refugee. Refugees arrive in Canada without passports, with the clothing on their backs, without food and possibly even without money. They are refugees and they need humanitarian aid.

A refugee will be integrated into Canadian society and become a worker. We need workers, we need these people. As for the false paranoia that terrorists and the like masquerade as refugees, they do not have to hide among the refugees because they can hide anywhere.

Canada must continue to welcome refugees. What does the member think of that?

• (1745)

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, if there are bogus refugees, by all means deport them, but what we should not do is draft a law based purely on fear. That is what this is. This fear is going to drive us to build more detention centres so we can detain these refugee claimants, rather than allowing them to work, to make a living so

that they can start paying taxes, because some of them are genuine refugees. By all means, if they are bogus, we should send them back. When we set a law, we should not be driven by paranoia and fear.

The other thing is that in the bill, because it prevents family reunification, it is denying genuine refugees the power to bring their families together, and that is cruel.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Trinity—Spadina for sincere concern for refugees. In the context of the NDP, she understands, unlike some of her colleagues, that there are fake claimants who do abuse our generosity, just as there are many legitimate claimants who need our protection. It is the need to recognize both sides of the ledger.

I appreciated her constructive work at committee in the last Parliament in the passage of Bill C-11. Will she not recognize that since that time, we have seen the explosive growth of unfounded claims coming from the European Union and virtually none of those claimants show up at their hearings?

Virtually all of those European claimants admit by themselves, of their own volition, that they do not need Canada's protection because they withdraw or abandon their own claims. Does she not think that we need flexible and fast tools to address large waves of unfounded claims such as those coming from the European Union?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. Within the law now, there are already means to fast track them. The key thing is to catch the smugglers, punish them, fine them, throw them in jail. The problem is with deporting the victims, because some of these people are victimized by their smugglers. They are told a pack of lies. They are told to come to Canada and get whatever they want. They pay a lot of money, their life savings, to the smugglers and the smugglers send them here.

Some of them are not refugees, we know that. However, the key thing is to go after the smugglers. The problem is, with deporting these people so quickly, we are not giving them the time to go to court to use them as witnesses to go after the smugglers and we can never catch the smugglers and try them.

What happens right now is in the last 10 years hardly any smugglers have been punished severely. It is very difficult to find them, catch them and convict them because their victims get deported before the court has a chance to go after them. That is why we need to go after the smugglers and not punish the refugees.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise to speak in support of Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, a bill that is designed to fulfill exactly that responsibility.

Government Orders

Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act, aims to strengthen Canada's immigration system in three ways. First, it includes further reforms to Canada's asylum system to make it faster and fairer. Second, it includes measures to address the despicable crime of human smuggling. Third, it gives the government authority to make it mandatory to provide biometric data with a temporary resident visa application.

Canadians have understandably become concerned by the growing waves of claimants coming from countries that generally do not produce refugees, such as those in the European Union. I do not think there is a single person who does not find it cause for concern that one quarter of refugee claims last year came from the European Union, which is more than from Africa and from Asia.

Even more concerning is that virtually all of the claims from the EU were withdrawn, abandoned or rejected. Unfortunately, it is hard-working Canadian taxpayers who bear the cost of these bogus claims and the costs are not cheap. The bogus claims from the EU last year cost Canadian taxpayers \$170 million. It is clear that too many people are abusing our generous immigration system and too many tax dollars are being spent on these bogus refugee claimants.

While the Balanced Refugee Reform Act was a positive step toward fixing many of the problems in our system, gaps remain that must be addressed. Bill C-31 includes many important measures to make the asylum system in Canada faster and fairer and to deter bogus claimants from abusing Canada's system. Under Bill C-31, claimants from countries which after extensive review have been deemed to be safe would have their claims processed in 45 days compared to the more than 1,000 days it takes under the current system. Also, bogus claimants would not have access to as many endless appeal routes that currently results in taking an average of almost 5 years to deport a failed claimant and in some cases more than 10.

However, let me be clear. Under Bill C-31, every eligible refugee claimant, regardless of what country they come from, would continue to receive a hearing before the independent Immigration Refugee Board. Just as is the case now, every refugee claimant would be able to seek juridical review by the federal court.

Bill C-31 adds a level of appeal for the majority of refugee claimants who would gain access to the new refugee appeals division. Bill C-31 would ensure that genuine refugees would receive Canada's protection faster, while those who would abuse our system would be removed from Canada more quickly. It would save Canadian taxpayers \$1.65 billion over five years, savings in welfare and other costs associated with bogus claims.

As I mentioned at the top of my remarks, the second piece of the protecting Canada's immigration system act would incorporate measures that would address human smuggling. Several months ago in the House, the Minister of Public Safety introduced Bill C-4, preventing human smugglers from abusing Canada's immigration system act. As my hon. colleagues are well aware, we debated the bill extensively throughout the fall sitting of Parliament.

Bill C-31 will replace Bill C-4, while keeping all of its long-needed measures. These measures would help maintain the integrity of our generous immigration system, while curtailing the abuse of

that system by human smugglers whose actions undermine the security and safety of Canadians.

Cracking down on human smugglers is an important element of protecting the integrity of our immigration system. That is why it is entirely appropriate that the provisions of the preventing human smugglers from abusing Canada's immigration system act have been included in this new legislation.

● (1750)

There is one notable change from Bill C-4, however, as Bill C-31 includes an exemption from detention for minors under the age of 16.

The final component of Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act, would create a legislative framework for the long-planned implementation of biometric technology as an identity management tool in our immigration and border control systems. This component of the legislation and its corresponding regulations that will follow would allow the government to make it mandatory for visa applicants to Canada to have their photographs and their fingerprints taken as part of their temporary resident visa applications.

Because biometric data is more reliable and less prone to forgery or theft than documents, these measures would strengthen immigration screening, enhance security and help reduce fraud. Biometrics form an effective tool to manage high volumes of applications and the growing sophistication in identity fraud. Using biometrics will help prevent known criminals, failed refugee claimants and previous deportees from using a false identity to obtain a Canadian visa. Implementing biometrics will bring Canada in line with the growing list of countries that already use biometrics in their immigration and border control programs. These countries include the United Kingdom, other states in the European Union and the United States.

Bill C-31 has been praised from coast to coast to coast. This is what the *Montreal Gazette* had to say:

Canada has a long-standing and well-deserved reputation as a place of refuge for people fleeing persecution in their homelands.

At the same time, however, it has also gained repute as an easy mark for the unscrupulous who fraudulently use our generous refugee determination system as a way to get into Canada without submitting to standard immigration requirements and procedures....

The legislation also proposes harsher penalties for those who engage in human smuggling, as well as for asylum-seekers who pay smuggling syndicates to get them to Canadian shores. And it allows for the collection of biometric data—fingerprints and digital photos—of people entering Canada on a visitor visa, a work permit or a study visa.

Both of these measures are advisable. Human smuggling is an odious enterprise that should be severely punished. And while the smugglers' clients are perhaps desperate people in many cases, they are nevertheless participants in an illegal activity that should be strongly discouraged.

Government Orders

The collection of biometric information is a sensible security precaution that will be a valuable tool in preventing people from slipping into the country with false identities....

Shielding the refugee system from false claimants is not only in the best interest of Canadians, on whom they are a financial burden, but also of legitimate applicants who stand to lose out if bogus claimants cast the system as a whole into disrepute.

Canada has a generous and fair immigration system that is the envy of the world. It has served Canada well and it has also served well those who come into our country legitimately, whether on a permanent basis or for a fixed period of time, seeking economic opportunities, protection from persecution or for family or personal reasons.

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that such an important system is always operating in our national interest as effectively and efficiently as possible. That means we have to preserve what works well in the immigration system and ameliorate the system in areas where there are shortcomings.

Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act, would do exactly what its name says. It would put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and bogus refugee claimants abusing our generous immigration system and receiving lucrative, taxpayer-funded health and social benefits.

The measures in Bill C-31 are necessary to protect the integrity of our immigration system. For that reason, I encourage all my hon. colleagues to support the legislation and allow these much needed measures to be enacted in a timely manner.

It is a pleasure to stand in the House and speak to Bill C-31. This legislation has been needed for a long time in Canada. I congratulate the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism in finally bringing this forward. This is a step in the right direction for all Canadians.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in response to the Parliamentary Secretary's remarks, I would say that, in fact, many people do not like Bill C-4, which is part of Bill C-31, because it includes a number of human rights violations. No, this bill does nothing to tackle smugglers or criminals; it attacks refugees.

My parents came here as refugees by boat. If this bill had been in effect at the time, they would have been considered illegal refugees and they could have been detained, along with my two brothers, who were one and three at the time.

The bill says that children would not necessarily be detained. This means that after going through all of the terrible things they went through, my parents and my brothers, upon arriving in a strange country, would have been separated. That is inhumane. Our party is proud to be on the other side of the debate on this senseless bill, which has been condemned by Amnesty International Canada and the Canadian Council for Refugees. I do not understand how this bill can be reassuring or fair, or how it can improve safety.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, the member stands in this House as a member of Parliament, born from refugee parents, and I congratulate her.

That is exactly what the refugee system is about. However, that is not what the refugee system continues to do because it has been taken advantage of time and time again. We have to modernize the system. We have to bring it into the 21st century. We have to do that. There is no discussion about this.

The right of appeal will still be there. Children under 16 years of age will not be incarcerated. We have to look at the cost of bogus claims, \$170 million to the Canadian taxpayers. We have to look at the abuse in the system, a \$1.67 billion cost to the Canadian taxpayers. We have to cut down on human smugglers, and we have to look at biometrics as a way to do this. We cannot do that with 19th century and 20th century ideas. We have to do it with 21st century ideas.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has some hard numbers at his fingertips in terms of how much money we are going to save the taxpayer.

He says \$1.6 billion and \$100-some million in one specific area. It is good the government has those numbers. I must say that most people would encourage government to actually speed up the process. We do believe that the system needed to be fixed and sped up.

I have a question for the member. There is a cost to the bill. When we talk about detention centres, there is an anticipated substantial cost increase. Can the member tell us what the cost of that aspect of the bill is going to be, given that he knows where we are going to save money? Does the member know where we are going to be spending money and how much is it going to be?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I think the part of my discussion that he obviously did not listen to was the whole debate surrounding bogus claims.

Legitimate claims are welcome, and they will be heard by a fair and impartial system. Bogus claims are what has been tying up the system. Ninety-five percent of these bogus refugee claims never ever show up for a hearing. Many of these are coming out of democratic countries in the European Union.

We have to find a way to plug that gap, and we are going to do that. I think the majority of Canadians support us in that attempt.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a member of the opposition talked about her family. That is a tremendous story. I suspect Vietnamese boat people were the refugees who came in 1979-80.

Government Orders

Those people who fled Vietnam went to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees processing camps in Southeast Asia where their claims were assessed. They were then referred for resettlement. Canada accepted some 60,000. That is what we encourage refugees to do, seek UN regional resettlement opportunities, not get in a leaky boat, paying \$50,000 to a criminal gang.

Does the member not agree with me that it is better that people pursue the normal, legal UN route for regional refugee protection as opposed to using dangerous smugglers to cross the Pacific Ocean?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, what we just heard was the minister's point of view. There are two totally different issues at stake here. We are not about to try to ignore refugees from around the world. Canada steps forward and does more than our share. We carry more than our load of accepting refugees from around the world. We will continue to do that.

However, we will not be the dumping ground for every syndicate and smuggling organization on the planet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-31. My colleagues across the floor will be happy to hear that I have almost lost my voice. So, this will be different than some of my speeches in the past. However, it is for a good cause.

We are talking about Bill C-31. First of all, what is dangerous about this bill is the concentration of power that it puts in the hands of the minister. We know very well that a minister should not have any say in processes that have been democratically created. For instance, in the past, to determine whether a country was safe or not, a panel of experts, including human rights specialists, had to be created. This bill gives that power to the minister. Why create a system that is much more arbitrary and less democratic to replace an existing process, an institution that has proven successful for Canada?

The government will agree with me that our immigration system was very well structured, despite certain delays. It does need some changes, but does that mean the government has to destroy our democratic institutions? Is that what the government is talking about when it talks about modernizing our Immigration and Refugee Protection Act?

I do not believe that the changes proposed by the minister will modernize the system. I believe they represent a step backwards. The government wants to control everything. I could give a number of examples. My colleague told me about a young Mexican he tried to save and help. Mexico would not be considered an unsafe country, and most refugees from Mexico would be sent back there. Yet all international organizations agree that Mexico is not a safe country. I sit on the House Subcommittee on International Human Rights. The subcommittee heard testimony from a Mexican delegation about how dire the situation was for people in Mexico. Human rights are constantly being violated by the government, which is corrupt and has been infiltrated by criminal organizations. It is very difficult for homosexuals in Mexico to live openly, even though the country is not considered to be unsafe.

Certainly, some European countries are democratic and developed in a sense, but there is pressure on human rights advocates and the rights of homosexuals, women and young women are not respected. Even though there is no armed conflict or danger, these people are often mistreated, arbitrarily imprisoned or tortured.

I have done a lot of work for Amnesty International, and I have met many political prisoners from countries like Greece, which would certainly not be considered unsafe, people who had acid thrown in their faces because they campaigned for human rights and union rights.

The powers the bill gives the minister are not democratic. They are arbitrary. It is not modernizing when a bill destroys our democratic institutions and puts powers in the minister's hands. I am not saying that the minister is acting in bad faith, but I wonder why the government has to destroy our democratic institutions to give itself powers.

It is important to know that there was a great deal of opposition to Bill C-4 across Canada. Many credible organizations, lawyers' groups and international agencies spoke out against Bill C-4 saying that it violates international conventions, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the fundamental rights of refugees. It is important to say that, even though the government dropped Bill C-4 from the order paper, it has reappeared in Bill C-31.

• (1805)

It is the same thing. It is called an omnibus bill. The government introduced its omnibus bill on criminal justice. It is doing the same thing today in the House by including clauses that go against the fundamental rights of Canadians and refugees, and that violate a number of basic principles of justice and of our democratic society. This bill has hidden clauses in order to keep the public in the dark. It is a practice commonly used by right-wing governments. They keep the public in the dark by withholding information so that the public is unaware of what is going on.

This strategy is condemned in many countries. One might say we are living in a dictatorship here. We do not have access to information and information is being hidden from Canadians. For the government to then blame the NDP is completely intolerable. The Conservatives form the government. They need not lay blame on the opposition parties. This government has a majority. If the government's bills violate the rights of Canadians, then it is the government's fault. The government need not blame the NDP.

Bill C-31, like Bill C-4, once again concentrates power in the hands of the minister. For example, humanitarian considerations cannot be cited when a claim is pending or within one year of a failed claim.

Government Orders

It is important to know that, after filing a claim, claimants have a very short period of time—15 days—to prove that they are not safe in their country. These people are at a disadvantage and cannot speak neither French nor English. They are given a mere 15 days to prove that they are in danger in their country. The government talks about red tape and so forth.

The government has 15 days to examine the claim, or it is rejected. That does not make sense at all. Our life could be in danger even if we come from a developed and democratic country. The minister must know this.

I have also heard the minister talk about illegal immigrants. We know that there is a difference between refugees and immigrants. Refugees are people who arrive in Canada, but without going through the same process as immigrants. That is understandable. They left their country in a hurry. They did not have the time to obtain a visa, because they were in a very dangerous and unsafe situation. We are talking about countries such as Greece and others. These people were in such a dangerous situation that they had to leave the country quickly without going through the process. For that reason, generalizing the process will not solve the problems.

They talked about bogus refugees, of thousands of false claims. Only two of the 27 countries in the European Union have problems. Should all refugees throughout the world be penalized because applications from only two countries present a problem? I do not believe so.

I have a question for the minister: who is going to arrest the so-called human smugglers? Where will they be when the refugees go to jail? What about the human traffickers? Who will arrest them? The minister should know that the people smuggling refugees are not usually in Canada. They are back in the home countries. The minister should know that. Will putting children and refugees in jail help the RCMP and government officials arrest those people? I do not think so.

Individuals and their families will be put in even greater danger. Families will not be allowed to bring their children or grandparents until they have been here for five years. A person can obtain refugee status, but cannot bring family members over. That makes no sense. Worse still, if a refugee's claim is denied, family members will be barred from applying. If a family is truly in danger, a person trying to save his family will be penalized just because the minister has decided that the country is safe.

• (1810)

I will give other members a chance to ask questions now.

• (1815)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before the hon. members deliver their speeches on this issue, I urge them all to study and really understand Canada's asylum system and this bill, rather than rising here and spewing nonsense. The speech we just heard was full of strange allegations that have nothing to do with reality.

For instance, the member said that all asylum seekers from Mexico need Canada's protection. However, 90% of asylum seekers from Mexico are refused by our legal system, through the Immigration and Refugee Board. In other words, most of them do

not need Canada's protection. She said it is inappropriate to talk about bogus claimants, but nearly two-thirds of refugee claimants in Canada are rejected by our fair and balanced legal system. She should have nothing to say to that.

For instance, nearly all refugee claimants from the European Union withdraw their own refugee claims. Does she not agree that we need to have certain tools to deal with the waves of bogus claims from developed, democratic countries, like those of the European Union?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the European Union, I am fully aware of the situation. I travelled to Europe myself and heard from many countries about this. Canada is having problems with claims from only two countries, and yes, most of those claims are not legitimate.

However, Mr. Minister, you know very well that Bill C-11 solved all of those problems and that negotiations were held with the opposition. Now that you have a majority, you are pointing the finger at the NDP.

Will you negotiate with us? No. Will you include the amendments that were proposed in this bill? No. So, we will not take any lessons from you, simply because you claim we do not know this bill. We know very well that you will do whatever you want, but this is a mistake.

You have problems, but this bill does not solve them. Stop generalizing the situation by saying that we are going to be overrun with refugees from all over the world. We are having problems with only two European Union countries. This does not mean we should penalize refugees from everywhere else.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would like to remind hon. members to address their comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Immigration is out of touch with reality. Instead of blaming my brilliant colleague, who did her homework and read the bill in detail, maybe he should go out into the field, visit various communities in urban areas and see what refugees are really up against.

My colleague is right to give the example of a Mexican from the LGBT community who received death threats for various reasons, including his sexual orientation, and who claimed refugee status in Montreal. He told me about his reality, and it is incredible. The minister is wrong to blame the opposition, which is doing its homework. He should go out into the field.

I wonder if my colleague could comment about that.

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, one hon. member will certainly appreciate and identify with what I am going to say.

I want to remind the minister that immigration is more than just a photo of the minister and the Prime Minister with representatives of certain cultural communities in a restaurant or a cultural organization. Immigration is much deeper than a little certificate that is sent to representatives of cultural communities with a photo taken with the Prime Minister and him.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act.

Canada is a welcoming and generous nation. In fact, Canada welcomes one in ten of the world's resettled refugees, almost more than any other country in the world. Our Conservative government is increasing the number of resettled refugees by 20%, to 14,500.

In addition to resettled refugees, many people flee their country of origin because they are persecuted and fear for their life. Unfortunately, Canada's immigration system is being abused by people who are not refugees, by people who would rather break the rules or pay to be smuggled into the country instead of waiting their turn in line.

For far too long, foreign criminals, human smugglers and bogus refugees have abused our immigration system. This abuse comes at a great cost. It is not just the monetary cost borne by Canadian taxpayers. It also comes at a cost to genuine refugees who are waiting longer than they should to get a decision on their claim and receive Canada's protection.

Today I stand in defence of genuine refugees, in defence of Canada's border integrity and for all Canadians whose abundant generosity has been exploited. The facts speak for themselves. Canada receives more refugee claims from the European Union than from Africa or Asia. More specifically, EU member state, Hungary, has become Canada's top source country for refugee claims. Hungarians made over 2,400 refugee claims around the world in 2010 and, of those, 2,300 were made in Canada. That is 23 times more claims made in Canada than in the rest of the world put together.

Further, in 2011, Canada received more than 4,400 claims from Hungarian nationals. These numbers have risen dramatically to the point where Hungarian nationals constituted 18% of all claimants to Canada in 2011. Yet, in the last few years, virtually all of the refugee claims from EU nationals were rejected, abandoned or withdrawn.

The average failed refugee claimant costs approximately \$55,000. That means that the unfounded claims from the 5,800 EU nationals who sought asylum last year alone cost Canadian taxpayers \$170 million. The facts make it clear that our immigration system is being abused.

Bill C-31 would make several improvements to our asylum system that would make it faster and fairer. An essential feature of Bill C-31 is the ability of the government to designate safe countries that do not typically produce refugees and who respect human rights. It is proposed that hearings on claims for people from safe countries would generally occur within 45 days compared to the current system in which it takes over 1,000 days for a decision.

Under Bill C-31, all eligible refugee claimants, including those from designated countries, would continue to receive a fair hearing at the independent Immigration and Refugee Board and would be able to seek judicial review of a negative decision to the Federal Court. To put the huge financial costs of bogus refugee claimants in perspective, it is estimated that Bill C-31 would save Canadian taxpayers approximately \$1.6 billion over a period of five years.

In addition to refugee reform, Bill C-31 includes measures to crack down on human smuggling. Human smuggling is a serious and despicable criminal offence that endangers human lives while stuffing the pockets of criminal organizations. This bill would send a clear message that the abuse of our immigration system by human smugglers will not be tolerated and every effort will be made to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians.

The proposed legislation would make it easier to prosecute human smugglers and impose mandatory minimum prison sentences of up to 10 years on convicted smugglers. We must change the perception of Canadian shores being a vulnerable target for these migrant vessels. It is important to continually strengthen our laws to ensure that we have the tools necessary to hold offenders accountable.

● (1820)

Bill C-31 also deals with the pull factors that result in migrants choosing to pay tens of thousands of dollars to be smuggled into Canada. Experience has shown that both the push and pull factors must be addressed to effectively deter human smuggling. It is important to underline that when migrants arrive as part of an illegal smuggling operation, they usually do not have documentation or have fraudulent documentation. It takes time to establish their identities and determine whether they pose a threat to the safety and security of Canadians and whether they are architects of the operation.

It is completely reasonable and expected by Canadians that smuggled migrants would be detained until their identities have been established and decisions made on their claims. To suggest that these people should immediately be released into our communities without knowing whether they pose a threat is completely irresponsible. It is important to note that under Bill C-31 minors under the age of 16 would not be detained.

Bill C-31 also includes provisions to ensure that the health benefits received by those who arrive as part of an illegal human smuggling operation are no more generous than what are received by the Canadian taxpayers who fund these benefits. Further, Bill C-31 would also prevent smuggled migrants from sponsoring subsequent family members for a period of five years. By addressing the pull factors that lead to the use of criminal human smugglers, Bill C-31 would be more effective at deterring this despicable crime from happening in the first place.

Finally, Bill C-31 would provide the government with the authority to collect biometric data from temporary residents seeking entry into Canada. Biometrics will be an important new tool to help protect the safety and security of Canadians by reducing identity fraud and identity theft. As fraudsters become more sophisticated, biometrics will improve our ability to keep violent criminals and those who pose a threat to Canada out of our country. Unfortunately, there are countless examples of serious criminals, human smugglers, war criminals and suspected terrorists, among others, who have entered Canada in the past. Under Bill C-31, foreign criminals would be barred from entering Canada thanks to biometrics.

Further, biometrics may result in faster processing and shorter wait times for legitimate visitors and immigrants to Canada, as visa officers would have an additional tool to help them make their decisions. The use of biometrics would put Canada in line with most other western countries, such as Australia, the U.K., the European Union, Japan and the United States, which are already using or preparing to use biometrics in immigration matters.

Bill C-31 would strengthen the integrity of our immigration system. This would mean that genuine refugee claimants would receive Canada's protection sooner. It would also mean that bogus refugee claimants who are abusing Canada's generosity would be processed and removed from the country more quickly. Bill C-31 would provide an expedited secure process for those who are genuinely in need of asylum and protection. It would provide a just framework from which Canadians could feel secure in knowing that their tax dollars were contributing to a structured and thoughtful refugee system.

Finally, this bill would protect our borders from dangers that all Canadians stand united in opposing. These changes are necessary and deserve the support of all parliamentarians.

• (1825)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, parliamentarians on this side of the House will never support a bill that would jail children. The government thought that was a good idea, to bring forth a bill that would jail refugees, men, women and children, for up to a year.

The government has made one change and will now only jail children who are 16 or 17 years old. However, what happens if a refugee family arrives with an eight-year-old child? Do we really think that those parents are going to stay in detention for a year and allow the state to separate them from their eight-year-old child? Absolutely not. We all know what will happen: The eight-year-old child will stay with the parents. Hence, we are still looking at children being jailed with their parents, and the government knows it.

The minister has said that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees approves of his designation of certain countries as safe. New Democrats have checked and what the high commissioner has really said is that if Canada is going to have a system designating countries as safe, there must be an appeal on the merits from an initial decision. Bill C-31 denies refugee claimants from designated safe countries an appeal before the refugee appeal division. I know the minister is not a lawyer, but he should know that an appeal to the

Federal Court is not an appeal on the merits; it is an appeal only on natural justice.

My question for the member is this. How can she justify a bill that deprives people of access to the refugee appeal division depending on the country they come from, in violation of what the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has required?

• (1830)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, when I was at home in my riding over December and January, I had an opportunity to meet with many of my constituents, who absolutely understand that our system is being abused.

To be clear, Canada has the most fair and generous system in the world. Canadians know this. Whether addressing refugee reforms, human smuggling or implementing the use of biometric data, Canadians are very aware that all of these things need to be addressed. That is what we are doing through Bill C-31.

This bill would provide more protection more quickly to those who are truly in need. It would weed out the bogus claimants who are abusing our generosity. It would save Canadian taxpayers at least, as we have said many times, \$1.6 billion over a five year period.

To underscore my comments on these facts, I would like to quote from *The Edmonton Journal* editorial, "Good moves on refugees", from February 17:

Given the financial stress placed on our system by those numbers, there has to be a more efficient, cost-effective means of weeding out the bogus claimants from Europe and elsewhere. Simply put, we cannot continue to give everyone the benefit of the doubt when it costs that much money and taxes our social systems unduly to do so.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the importance of science to the fishery.

As a result of the intervention by the government with respect to the Fisheries Act and what it refers to as a modernization of the fishery, we are seeing little respect being given to science and to the scientists who play such an important role in ensuring the sustainability of our natural resource. Whether it is dealing with the cod stocks, or any species or fishery for that matter, science is so important to ensuring that when we put quotas in place we know exactly what we are doing. Any decision that we make with respect to the fishery should be based on science, as well as input from those who engage in the fishery, whether it is those in the fish processing side or in the harvesting side.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, we are finding from the government little appreciation for science and the influence of science, in terms of the health of the fish stocks. When we look at the fish habitats and what is being said today by former Conservative fisheries ministers with the changes to fish habitats, it just does not make sense.

More than 600 Canadian scientists, including some of the country's leading experts in environmental protection and animal research, are asking the Prime Minister to abandon plans to remove habitat protections from the federal Fisheries Act.

It is serious when we have scientists, who know only too well how important this is, go to this extreme to plead with the Prime Minister not to go down this path. These people have the knowledge and the expertise. Those of us who serve in these positions, including the Prime Minister, ministers of the Crown and bureaucrats, are not on the front lines in terms of what happens in the fishery. It is the scientists we rely upon. They spend years researching these topics. The fishers and those who process and harvest the fishery have the knowledge necessary to ensure a sustainable fishery and to ensure that we do what is right in terms of fish habitats.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, these scientists say changing the law would be a most unwise action. It would jeopardize many important fish stocks and the lakes, estuaries and rivers that support them. They are encouraging, in fact, they are imploring, the Prime Minister to abandon this initiative, as it is currently drafted.

This is not coming from me. This is not coming from an MP for Random—Burin—St. George's, where my communities are primarily rural communities that depend very heavily upon the fishery to ensure that the people have a livelihood and can provide for their families. This is coming from scientists who have devoted their lives, as this is their area of expertise, to looking into these subject areas. They are looking at what the government is proposing here with respect to the Fisheries Act and they are saying it is wrong.

I am asking the government to listen to those scientists, to recognize how important it is that we listen to people with the expertise, the knowledge based on their experience and their research, that this is the wrong thing to do.

People have answers. The government does not have all the answers. The opposition does not have all the answers. However, I can say that people who spend their lives researching these topics do so seriously and they know that this is wrong. We are asking, on their behalf, for the government to take their request seriously.

• (1835)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her interest in this matter. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to some of the comments she made.

Particularly, I want to address the issue of science and how the future of the fishing industry depends on science. I think we agree on this question.

Our department is a science-based organization. In fact, at Fisheries and Oceans Canada excellence in science is the cornerstone of all our operations. That does not mean, however, that we should

simply rely on the ways of the past. As a department we cannot stand still in how we approach our scientific mandate. Therefore, over the past year we have implemented changes in how we organize and manage our scientific resources. As a result, there are more opportunities than ever for our scientists to work collaboratively in multidisciplinary teams to address complex multi-faceted challenges.

More to the point, we are using our science assets more strategically. This allows us to strengthen our regulatory capacity and explore new approaches for meeting our crucial oceans management and marine and fish habitat conservation and protection mandates.

The Canadian government is consistently working with our partners domestically and internationally to ensure that future generations inherit healthy oceans and ocean resources. We are protecting our ocean resources on a number of fronts and we are achieving real results.

Scientific knowledge and consultation with our stakeholders will continue to be the basis of our policies. This knowledge and experience will be vital as we continue our work to protect Canada's diverse marine and aquatic resources.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to the conservation and sustainable use of our ocean resources using the best science possible. To do that we depend on our scientific institutes, laboratories and centres of expertise for vital information to make fisheries conservation decisions that are both environmentally sound and economically productive. We will continue to use the knowledge gained from our scientific research to inform decisions and policies that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Given the current financial environment globally, within Canada and within government, it makes good sense to step back, recalibrate and set a new direction. Therefore, over the past year we have reviewed all of our policies, programs and services. That will ensure they are consistent with our core mandate, relevant to Canadians and effective and efficient in meeting our objectives. In short, we have been moving forward, not backward. Even better, we have been moving forward as a department, together with our partners and stakeholders. That is something in which we can all take pride.

What I am saying is this. Deficit reduction is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity for renewal and transformation. We need to take advantage of this opportunity to take a hard look at ourselves to find better ways to do things. We need to ask ourselves what our core business should be, what the right capacities are, and whether there are better systems and ways of delivering services that will help us keep delivering excellence to Canadians and meet the many demands of the 21st century.

I can assure the House that our future investments in science will be designed to augment our research capacity and assure sustainable fisheries and trade into the future.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1840)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, from listening to my colleague read his text, it appears to me, and I am sure to those listening, that he genuinely believes in what he is saying and that he thinks it is accurate.

The problem is that he said that the government is prepared to listen to scientists, but let me repeat that more than 600 Canadian scientists, including some of the country's leading experts in environmental protection and animal research, have said that it is wrong to go down this path.

In fact, David Schindler, who is a professor of ecology at the University of Alberta, the lead author of the letter, has said in a news release, "It is the explicit role of government to find the balance between protecting this habitat and encouraging sustainable economic growth, not to pit them against one another".

How can the member genuinely say that the government is listening to scientists when 600 scientists, leading experts, are saying that what the government is planning to do is wrong? They are saying to please not go down that path. They broke it open and we know this is happening. They are asking the government to listen. They have been doing the research. They know what is important.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The time has expired.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, although the member has raised concerns and some scientists have raised concerns, they are commenting on something they have not been informed about and they need to wait for that.

The fact is in 2009 the Auditor General made several recommendations regarding implementation of the policy for management of fish habitat. She raised some concerns in those years. We have also heard from parliamentarians. Perhaps she herself has raised some issues on this. We have heard from provinces and stakeholders that the policy is in need of renewal. We are serious about making changes that streamline the process and place efforts where they are most needed. We remain committed to the protection of fish habitat and to carrying it out in the most efficient and effective way possible.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

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 6:43 p.m.)

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