



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, May 17, 2012**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 17, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (A), 2012–13

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (A) for the financial year ending March 31, 2013, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

\* \* \*

• (1005)

[*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 five petitions.

\* \* \*

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in relation to its review of the delivery of front-line health and well-being services for Canadian veterans.

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### PETITIONS

#### RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of close to 200 residents of the city of Mississauga who are expressing their views on section 223 of the Criminal Code with respect to when human life begins.

#### PENSIONS

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present five sets of petitions today signed by hundreds

of people from my hometown of Hamilton who are urging the government to keep the age of eligibility for the OAS at 65.

The petitioners rightly point out that only 31% of Canadians have been able to contribute to RRSPs and, even then, many saw their savings evaporate in the recent market downturn. The petitioners also note that only 40% of Canadians have workplace pensions and the future of many of those pension plans is increasingly tenuous.

Since over a quarter of a million seniors are now living in poverty and public pensions provide at most \$15,000 to the typical retiree, the petitioners are calling on the government to drop its ill-considered change to the OAS, maintain the current age of eligibility and make the requisite investments in the guaranteed income supplement to lift every senior out of poverty.

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I too stand to present a petition taking exception to the government's decision to increase the age of eligibility from 65 to 67.

This two-year delay will cost our lowest-income seniors over \$30,000 in benefits. Single women will be disproportionately affected by this change, as they tend to rely more heavily on OAS and GIS payments, and low-income Canadians rely far more heavily on OAS and GIS.

The petitioners are asking the government to reconsider this decision because of the impact it will have, particularly on Canadians of low income and women.

[*Translation*]

#### HOUSING

**Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP):** Madam Speaker, today I am very pleased to table a petition in the House from the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, better known as FRAPRU, a national coalition fighting for the right to housing.

The few pages that I have in my hands are just a small sample of this petition. I have a full box before me, and that is only part of the petition that was signed by over 27,000 people, including 24,000 from Quebec. You may wonder what has driven so many people to sign a petition like that. It is very simple.

*Routine Proceedings*

They want the federal government to provide the necessary funding to renovate, improve and modernize all social housing, low-income housing, housing co-ops and non-profit housing. Most of those buildings are more than 20 years old. Understandably, renovation is a necessity, not a luxury.

They are also asking the federal government to maintain subsidies that allow low-income tenants to pay rent based on their income. Otherwise, thousands of low-income tenants will either have to pay two or three times as much rent or they will have to move to apartments that are likely to be significantly less hygienic.

The government has a choice. It can either insist on investing in the Cadillac of fighter jets and in mega-prisons, or it can create true wealth by combatting poverty and making sure that Canadians have access to decent and affordable housing.

[*English*]

## PENSIONS

**Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Madam Speaker, as members will have noted, there is profound concern across the country with regard to pensions and the security of pensions, and I have a petition in that regard.

The petitioners are petitioning the House of Commons because the Old Age Security Act does not bring into account how expensive the basic needs of Canadian seniors are today and will be in the future. Changes are needed to allow for Canadian seniors to be pulled out of poverty, and we can do that.

The undersigned citizens of Canada call upon the Parliament of Canada to enact Bill C-287, introduced by New Democrats to create a consumer price index for consumers over the age of 60, which would then be used to amend old age security and, therefore, ensure that seniors receive the payments they need in order to survive.

• (1010)

## HUMAN RIGHTS

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions.

The first petition is signed by residents of the Kitchener—Waterloo area who are very concerned about the human rights situation, in particular the persecution of Falun Dafa and Falun Gong within China.

The petitioners ask that Parliament, the Prime Minister and other representative of the Privy Council make it very clear in dealings with China that Canadians stand up for human rights.

## 41ST GENERAL ELECTION

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, the second petition deals with what has been called for short “the robocall scandal”. It comes from residents in Kingston, Ajax and Belleville.

The petitioners are demanding, as have many petitioners before them, a full public independent inquiry to determine what went on with the deliberate attempts to mislead voters in the 2011 elections.

## HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the following petition.

The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the fact that horses are ordinarily kept and treated as sports and companion animals, that horses are not raised primarily as food-producing animals, that horses are commonly administered drugs that are strictly prohibited from being used at any time in all other food-producing animals destined for the human food supply and that Canadian horsemeat products that are currently being sold for human consumption in domestic and international markets are likely to contain prohibited substances.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the House of Commons and Parliament to bring forward and adopt into legislation Bill C-322, an act to amend the health of animals act and the meat inspection act, thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption as well as horsemeat products for human consumption.

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## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 577.

[*Text*]

Question No. 577—**Hon. John McCallum:**

With regard to government employment levels, for each of the federal electoral districts of Parry Sound—Muskoka, Macleod, Haldimand—Norfolk, Halton, Edmonton Centre, Central Nova, Mégantic—L'Érable and Eglinton—Lawrence: (a) what is the current total number of federal employees in the riding; and (b) what is the total number of anticipated job reductions in the riding for the fiscal year (i) 2012-2013, (ii) 2013-2014, (iii) 2014-2015?

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Treasury Board Secretariat cannot produce these statistics by riding.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

## QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Madam Speaker, if Question No. 576 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## Government Orders

[Text]

Question No. 576—**Mr. Frank Valeriote:**

With respect to tax returns filed with the Canada Revenue Agency, for each tax year between 2006 and 2011: (a) what is the total number of tax returns filed, broken down by tax year, by (i) individuals, (ii) corporations; (b) for the answer to part (a)(i) and (a)(ii), what is the total number of tax returns filed by (i) individuals who have been reassessed, broken down by tax year, (ii) corporations that have been reassessed, broken down by tax year; (c) for the answer to part (b)(i), of the total number of tax returns filed by individuals who have been reassessed, (i) what is the total number of individuals who received a refund, broken down by tax year, (ii) what is the total number of individuals who had a change to their tax payable and were required to repay an amount or had a balance due, broken down by tax year; (d) for the answer to part (b)(ii), of the total number of tax returns filed by corporations that were reassessed, (i) what is the total number of corporations that received a refund, broken down by tax year, (ii) what is the total number of corporations that had a change to their tax payable and were required to repay an amount or had a balance due, broken down by tax year; (e) for the answer to part (c)(i), broken down by tax year, (i) what is the total monetary amount refunded to individuals, (ii) was interest applied on the amounts refunded, (iii) what was the total monetary amount of interest refunded, (iv) what was the interest rate applied to the refunds; (f) for the answer to part (d)(i), broken down by tax year, (i) what is the total monetary amount refunded to corporations, (ii) was interest applied on the amounts refunded, (iii) what was the total monetary amount of interest refunded, (iv) what was the interest rate applied to the refunds; (g) for the answer to part (c)(ii), broken down by tax year, (i) what is the total monetary amount of tax payable repaid by individuals due to a reassessment, (ii) was interest applied to the balance due, (iii) what was the total monetary amount of interest collected from the repayments, (iv) what was the interest rate applied to the balance due; (h) for the answer to part (d)(ii), broken down by tax year, (i) what is the total monetary amount of tax payable repaid by corporations due to a reassessment, (ii) was interest applied to the balance due, (iii) what was the total monetary amount of interest collected from the repayments, (iv) what was the interest rate applied to the balance due; (i) for the answer to part (c)(i) and (d)(i), when was the notice of the reassessment of tax returns, which resulted in a new amount refunded, sent to (i) individuals, broken down by tax year and by month, (ii) corporations, broken down by tax year and by month; (j) for the answer to part (c)(ii) and (d)(ii), when was the notice of the reassessment of tax returns, which resulted in a new amount due of taxes payable, sent to (i) individuals, broken down by tax year and by month, (ii) corporations, broken down by tax year and by month?

(Return tabled)

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

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

### POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-25, An Act relating to pooled registered pension plans and making related amendments to other Acts, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[English]

## SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Deputy Speaker:** There is one motion in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-25. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

[Translation]

I shall now put Motion No. 1 to the House.

[English]

## MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP)** moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-25 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

She said: Madam Speaker, it is important that we look very carefully at the pooled registered pension plan, because it simply does not serve Canadians. In addition to not serving Canadians, it does nothing to solve Canada's pension crisis.

The pension crisis has been the subject of debate for the past several years. The issue is that more than 11 million Canadian workers do not have a workplace pension plan. Old age security and the Canada pension plan, which everyone has, do not provide enough money for people to live on in their retirement. To make matters worse, most Canadians are not making up for their lack of pension plan by saving for retirement on their own. Less than one-third of people entitled to contribute to RRSPs actually do so. There is now more than \$600 billion in unused RRSP contribution room being carried forward, and only about one-third of Canadian households are currently saving at levels that will generate sufficient income to cover their non-discretionary expenses in retirement.

It also needs to be noted that the market is not a reliable place in which to gamble retirement security. Turmoil on financial markets has had and will continue to have a devastating impact on workplace pensions. People who were saving for retirement through RRSPs have found all too often that the value of their investments has dropped so much that they are now faced with having to postpone their retirement or struggle to replace retirement savings by attempting to find some kind of work. The reality is, however, that finding employment at age 68 or 70 is profoundly difficult. The workplace has changed, and the skills that retirees once brought to the job are no longer marketable.

For several years there has been a clear consensus among experts that real pension reform was and continues to be critical. However, rather than intelligently and positively engaging in reform that is practical, the government has instead introduced pooled registered pension plans, PRPPs, which, according to the federal finance minister, will make low-cost, private sector pension plans accessible to millions of Canadians who have up to now not had access to such plans. It is magic.

The legislation introduced in mid-November would allow employers to offer PRPPs to their employees. The scheme would be run by insurance companies and other financial institutions that would pool the savings of workers whose employers sign up for the program. The financial institutions would run the program on behalf of employers and, of course, would charge fees for doing so. Employers would not have to contribute to the plan. Workers' savings would be locked in unless employees provide notice in writing that they want to opt out, which, apparently, would be allowed.

*Government Orders*

No pension would be guaranteed by this program. In effect, it is yet another voluntary savings scheme that would do nothing to address the pension crisis we face. Since very few people take advantage of existing voluntary retirement savings schemes, it is not clear why officials are claiming that proposed PRPPs will prove more attractive than existing programs. So far, the only advantage being promoted by PRPPs is that management fees will be lower than for individual RRSPs since contributions will be pooled. However, there is no guarantee of lower fees nor is there any certainty that this will be a big selling point for the plans. It is also worth noting that there is no evidence people are not saving through RRSPs because of the high management fees. It is far more likely that, because individuals are raising families, paying bills, trying to manage the cost of housing and educating kids, there is no money left at the end of the month for an RRSP.

The PRPP is not a defined benefit plan. It does not provide a secure retirement income with a set replacement rate of pre-retirement income. It is not fully transferrable. It is not indexed to inflation and will not increase with the increasing cost of living. Employers, not employees, will decide contribution levels and it will not be mandatory for employers to contribute or match workers' contributions. Without employers contributing, it is not really a pension plan. In fact, employers who do not help their employees save for retirement could end up with a competitive advantage over those who do.

● (1015)

Canada does not need yet another voluntary tax-assisted retirement savings program. It needs public pensions that provide all Canadians with a basic guarantee of adequate income that will protect their standard of living in retirement. Expanding the Canada pension plan would meet this objective.

In fact, federal and provincial finance ministers seemed set to take this route when they assembled for their meeting in Alberta in December 2010. However, because Alberta opted out, the federal government decided to abandon talks and introduce the PRPP scheme instead.

Improving the replacement rate of CPP retirement benefits would provide much better retirement pensions to virtually all Canadians. A relatively modest increase in contribution rates would be required, but that could be phased in over a period of time, as the Canadian Labour Congress and others have proposed.

The CPP covers all workers, including those who are self-employed, and its benefits would be guaranteed in relation to earnings and years of service. They would be indexed for inflation and fully portable from one job to another. This option would address the two key issues in the pension system that are causing concern, the lack of coverage of workplace pension plans and the fact that individuals are not saving for their retirement on their own. As well, of course, an expanded CPP could reduce federal expenditures on GIS, because more people would have adequate retirement incomes.

While the government says CPP contribution rates cannot be increased when there is a fragile economy, it is worth noting that when the financing of CPP was changed at the end of the 1990s, combined employer-employee CPP contribution rates nearly

doubled from 5.6% of covered earnings to 9.9% over a five-year period, during which the unemployment rate fell from 9.6% to 7.6%. It should also be noted that the PRPP scheme will do nothing to help the baby boomer generation now coming up to retirement.

It seems this is a lost generation as far as pension reform is concerned. It has been estimated that roughly one-third of Canadians now in the age group 45 to 64 are likely to end up with incomes that fall far short of adequate minimum incomes and/or incomes that would allow them to maintain their standard of living when they retire.

The adequacy of CPP benefits has been an issue for more than 30 years. It is time now for federal and provincial governments to set aside ideology and work together to solve the problem.

The study by pension expert and Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives research associate Monica Townson provides a thorough analysis of the PRPP program and argues that expanding the Canada pension plan would provide better retirement pensions to virtually all Canadians. Ms. Townson found that the expansion of the CPP would provide a mandatory defined benefit pension to virtually all Canadians, giving them a basic retirement income that for modest and middle income earners would preserve their standard of living.

The government's PRPP proposal does not do that. It does not guarantee a pension. Benefits would depend on selection of investments and stock market performance. Participation would depend on an employer's deciding to take part in the program. It is basically just a defined contribution pension.

In a defined contribution plan, there are no guarantees of how much money would be left when an individual retires. The risks are borne entirely by the individual employee. In these types of plans, the amount of money available at retirement depends on the outcomes of the investments, which cannot be relied upon. Defined contribution plans lack the security of defined benefit pension plans like the CPP-QPP, which pay a guaranteed set amount upon retirement.

It is important to remember that Bill C-25 places no caps on administration fees or costs, and merely assumes lower costs will emerge through competition in the marketplace. Financial institutions like banks, insurance companies and trust companies stand to profit substantially from these fees. However, expanding the CPP-QPP would not cost the government any more than its proposed PRPP.

● (1020)

More important, expanding the CPP-QPP would not entail transferring huge management fees to private financial institutions.

*Government Orders*

How can I get through to the government? Seniors have worked hard all their lives. They deserve decent retirement. Bill C-25 would not provide that.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Madam Speaker, based on the NDP's position that the pooled registered pension plan would not be good enough because it is not a defined pension plan, does that mean the party is opposed to RRSPs? That is a voluntary program that has been around for many decades. Is that party advocating we get rid of RRSPs as a tool available to Canadians for saving for retirement?

• (1025)

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Madam Speaker, as everyone knows, RRSPs have been around for a long time and they are quite significantly entrenched in our system. People need to know that unfortunately there are problems with RRSPs that the government simply does not talk about.

First and foremost, it is about \$17 billion in terms of cost to provincial and federal governments in order to sponsor these RRSPs, \$5 billion for the provinces, \$12 billion out of federal government revenue every year. Imagine what we could do with \$17 billion in federal and provincial government revenues in terms of making sure there is pension security for Canadians.

The government also does not tell people that the management fees I referred to take up as much as 40% of the investment an individual makes in an RRSP over a 40 or 45 year period. That means these folks think they are going to have enough and they are actually making headway, but the reality is they are not. They are being taken advantage of in many ways.

We cannot get rid of our RRSPs because they have been entrenched for too long. But we need to be cognizant of their downside.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague from London—Fanshawe. I am glad to have my RRSPs. I have been trying to put money away in RRSPs. However, when one looks at their efficacy, one finds that overall they cost the system a tremendous amount and really provide little pension availability, and they provide less as we look down the income scale. The people who most need pension benefits are less likely to find them through RRSPs.

I am attracted to the idea of more municipal bonds. I know we are thinking outside the Bill C-25 box, but what does the member for London—Fanshawe think of Canadians being able to put their retirement savings in municipal bonds in their own communities?

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Madam Speaker, that is something we should be investigating.

In December 2010, the federal government said it was going to sit down with the provinces and talk practically in a progressive way about the retirement crisis we face. Perhaps future talks with a different government would find something solid and workable. I hope there is a different government in 2015. In fact, I know there will be a different government.

Perhaps we can sit down with municipalities and find something solid and workable that would invest our pension funds in a way that provides a significant return, safety and security, defined benefits

and the kind of pension deserved by Canadians who have spent their entire lives building this country, putting in place the social safety net. It would be far better than allowing that bunch to destroy our social safety net, because, quite frankly, that is what they are up to.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from London—Fanshawe for articulating what really is wrong with pooled registered pension plans.

When clearly there is unlimited room in an RRSP for most folks, why does the government want to duplicate it? It is just the same plan all over again, only with a different fee structure; it looks fancy and has a nice name. It would let workers think that somehow magic will happen.

The reality is that if people do not have money for an RRSP, they will not have money for a pooled registered pension plan. The government would argue that it can come off at source and therefore the tax is lower, but people can do the same thing with an RRSP.

Does my colleague from London—Fanshawe think the government is headed in the wrong direction and is really handing out a fairy tale to workers across this country that somehow this plan would help them in their retirement years?

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Madam Speaker, it is indeed a fairy tale. I would call it a myth. I would call it an attempt to create an illusion. The Conservatives are very good at illusions. They have a whole box of tricks. The point is that pooled registered pension plans are not what they are cracked up to be. They depend on the stock market. It is not safe out there.

• (1030)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Madam Speaker, in this timeframe we often make speeches about the legislation, but it is a debate and I am going to debate what I just heard from the member opposite.

It is unbelievable. First of all, the NDP members need to know that the CPP, which they like to claim is the panacea for all retirement savings, is invested in the stock market. We have a board that looks after the billions of dollars invested in the CPP, and it is invested in the stock market.

I am a bit frustrated and angry. I do not know why the members criticize the investments in the stock market as if it is something evil, something that is not going to return anything to anybody. Our CPP, the savings of every working Canadian, is invested in the stock market, and there is an investment board that looks after that investment. We cannot ignore the fact that all investments, whether CPP, RRSP or individual stocks, are invested in the stock market. We should get off the concept that there is something evil about or wrong with investing in businesses that will create jobs and growth in our country. That is what the stock market does for us. It provides retirement savings for every pension plan,—OMERS, for example, and all the pension plans, public and private. The stock market is a key component to every savings tool that is out there. We should drop the concept that because it is invested in the stock market, it is something risky or evil in which we cannot participate.

*Government Orders*

The other comment that was just made was in regard to RRSPs. Based on the NDP philosophy that I just heard, the members would remove the concept of people saving for themselves for their retirement, because it is taking tax money from the Government of Canada, and they think they can spend it better than we who are saving for our retirement.

I disagree 100% with that. It has been a very good tool for Canadians to save for their retirement. Is everyone taking it up? Even I have room in my RRSP. I have not taken it all up, and many Canadians do not, but that does not mean we remove the tool. We do things to improve the tool, and the pooled registered pension plan is an opportunity.

Our friends across the way talk about talking to Canadians at their kitchen table. A large number of organizations have come to committee and have told Canadians and the government that this would be a tool in the toolbox of retirement, that the pooled registered pension plan would be an opportunity that does not exist now that would be another piece of the puzzle for which to be able to save.

Why would members turn that down? The opposition may like something else, but does that mean that everything else is wrong just because they want something else? I disagree. If they were true to themselves, they would talk to the individuals in their ridings and say it is not the panacea that is going to solve everyone's retirement plan, but it is an opportunity.

For people who work for a small business that does not have a retirement plan, there would be a program that offers a pooled system, the key being that it would be pooled. Companies with small numbers and even those who are self-employed could belong to a plan that takes the risk and spreads it over a larger number of contributors. It would take the risk from the employer away because the administration would be done by a third party. It would take that liability away and it would pool the opportunity that is not available now.

Vitally important to me is the portability. This pension plan would be portable. People would take it with them. When people leave company A and go to company B, if company B does not have a pooled plan they could still keep their money in the pooled plan they are in. If company B has a pooled plan, they could move their money over to make that happen. They could keep their money in there.

•(1035)

There is nothing wrong with locked in. Part of the problem with Canadians, including myself, is that we are not great savers for retirement. We have all these other things. I have two daughters in university, for example, who cost me a lot of money. I did not do a good job of saving for that.

Lots of Canadians have issues with savings. Deductions at source help with savings. The pooled registered pension plan would have deductions at source. Those deductions would go into a pooled pension plan for individuals. If they moved or things changed, the funds would be locked in. Some could always be taken out if something happened, they become disabled or had other issues and needed to access the capital. That would be their capital and they

would be able to get it, but really, it would be a retirement savings program.

Members opposite talk about the CPP as a panacea. It is a deduction at source and it is locked in. We cannot take it out until we retire. This is the exact same process. We are doing it so that Canadians have an opportunity to prepare themselves and their families for their retirement.

Members opposite say it is voluntary, it is an opt-out program. If individuals join a company that has a pooled plan, they are automatically enrolled. They have to make a decision within perhaps the first six weeks or six months. There is a timeframe within which they can opt out. They may not be interested in saving for their retirement in a pooled plan, and they may opt out. It is a program that attempts to ensure that Canadians put a little bit aside for their retirement, which I think is what we are all after. There is not one member in the House who does not want a decent retirement for those who have worked all their lives and for their families.

However, we have to have tools to do that. The RRSP is an individual tool. I agree with the previous speaker, the cost of those programs is high. It is exactly why we want to go with the pooled system. It is portable, it is locked in and it has a lower cost.

Let us look at an example. We can all buy paper individually for our offices. It is all basically the same thing, paper. If we purchase in a pool, everyone gets paper. It is cheaper, more efficient and more effective. That is what pooled registered pension plans are for. That is why it is important that we move forward with this.

Members opposite cannot support this because they want the CPP changed. They know and Canadians know that it takes two-thirds of the provinces with two-thirds of the population to make a change to CPP. We cannot unilaterally do it. It is not legal for us to do it, we are not capable of doing it and we do not have support from all provinces at present.

Not speaking for the government, but for myself, reviewing what is happening with CPP and making changes is a policy initiative that I fully support. However, if we cannot get the provinces to agree, we have to find other solutions. It might not be the final solution, but we have to find some other opportunities. Why are opposition members ignoring opportunities that exist for which we have general support?

Before I wrap up, I want to say that this is an opportunity that will pass this House and will be for federal employees. I would like each and every province, including my own province of Ontario, to take advantage of this opportunity. It would not cost a dime.

I understand from the Ontario budget that Ontario will not proceed with legislation required to enable this to happen in Ontario for other employment groups. I have no idea why the Ontario government would not do that. Why is it denying Ontarians the opportunity to save for their retirement? It does not make sense to me. It does not cost anything. We should be moving ahead. We should be looking for tools that solve the problem.



*Government Orders*

RRSPs do not solve the problem, but would we get rid of them? Absolutely not. We have to look for opportunities, we have to look for tools. The pooled registered pension plan is a tool that does not exist now that would help many working Ontarians and other Canadians. I would appreciate the support of everyone in the House.

• (1040)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for commenting on this plan that we consider particularly toxic, in that people will be well aware of what they are investing but will have no guarantee of what they will get back. This is not savings; it is not really a pension plan. It is quite simply a financial instrument to enable financial institutions to make even more money.

The banks will be the first to benefit from this money. They are the ones that get paid first. Perhaps the hon. member can provide confirmation: it is the financial institutions that collect the administrative fees, that set rates to make a profit. Then, if there is a return, it goes to the participants' savings, and if there is a deficit, if the return is negative, the financial institutions are in no way prevented from collecting administrative fees and setting a profitable rate, which worsens the shortfall.

[English]

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Madam Speaker, what was just expressed by my colleague from the other side is a complete fallacy.

Of course the pooled pension plan would have fees. Administrators would charge a fee for administering, but the law would set the level of those administrative fees, which could be much cheaper in a pooled system than individuals see through the RRSP system that we have now. Therefore, we would have some say.

I have no problem with organizations providing a tool for retirement. They are providing the service of administration, and taking that administrative burden off employers. Employers do not have pension plans, defined or otherwise, or DC plans, because of the costs and liabilities that go with them. This is an opportunity to remove that liability, to provide an opportunity for employees to have a savings program at a lower cost because it is pooled across a larger number. If the organization, whether it is a bank or a life insurance company, charged an administrative fee, it would be allowed to do so. Those administration fees would be reviewed and controlled by this legislation.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, speaking of tools, I want to talk about RRSPs. The member is right, they are a tool. When we consider the whole package of retirement funds, I agree that this pooled pension plan is one of the tools in the shed that is certainly of good benefit for many, but not really a lot.

If we are talking about doing a lot of heavy lifting with a shovel, what the member is armed with here today is a very large spoon. There is no doubt that it does its work. The problem is, when he talks about pooling the purchasing of paper to bring costs down, not everybody is buying paper. Therefore, I would suggest to him that, in addition to this, maybe he should look at using that CPP investment board that he spoke of as a voluntary option to supplement the

current mandatory CPP payments. This would be a vehicle, another tool in the shed.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Madam Speaker, the hon. member across likes to ask me questions, and I like to answer them.

I am not sure if the Liberal Party will have this in its platform the next time, but in the past it put forward making CPP voluntary. People could take that deduction, voluntarily add more money on their own and the CPP board could manage it for them. That is what the Liberals' proposal has been. If they do not know that, or they do not understand it, they should read their own platform.

The pooled pension plan would allow small, medium and large companies that do not have a pension program to pool together and have required deductions at source for those under the plan, whether they are in the same industry or not.

The voluntary piece is what is at issue. Canadians are not great savers unless we take it off their paycheques, which has been the case, including for myself. If they are part of a pooled plan, it is an automatic deduction that is locked in, which is much better than the voluntary system the Liberals are advocating.

• (1045)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I am able to add a few words today on what is a very interesting bill. It clearly demonstrates first-hand the differences among the Conservative-Reform Party, the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party.

I will pick up on the member's reference to the Liberal Party's position, saying it wanted to make CPP optional. Of course, that is not true. Let me start by saying that the whole issue of pension has been a very interesting subject to Liberals for generations. In fact, the area of retirement and making sure our seniors are taken care of is nothing new for the Liberal Party. The Canada pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement were all programs initiated by Liberal prime ministers, going back to some of the ideas that were at the forefront in making a difference and enhancing seniors' pensions today. The Liberal seniors critic today was talking about how we could have incorporated some form of additional contributions to benefit CPP.

What I like about this particular bill is it shows that there are differences among political parties. Let me reference the NDP's position. It is saying it does not support this bill. It does not recognize pooled registered plans as a viable alternative for consumers, individual companies and self-employed individuals. I do not understand why. Many individuals would see this as a positive step forward. It is not going to be the major pension supplement into the future for our seniors but many seniors would be able to benefit from this program.

*Government Orders*

It is not just the Liberal Party that recognizes that. Some provincial administrations across the country have also seen the value of it. Thousands of small businesses throughout the country have seen the value of pooled registered pension plans. There seems to be fairly tangible support for the concept of having pooled registered pension plans. This is where Liberals differ from New Democrats on this bill.

Then there are the Conservatives, or the Reform-Conservatives as they are better known as nowadays, saying they want to create the fund with management fees. Australia has developed a similar program and the management fees are a killer. They are taking away a great deal of profit, which would, in essence, go back to the seniors who are hoping to be able to use this money to supplement their CPP and OAS.

It was not that long ago that the leader of the Liberal Party spoke on this bill at second reading and talked about the overhead cost structure for CPP. Why are we not going out of our way to incorporate or allow for some sort of similar situation, perhaps one in which the pooled pension plan would have the same structure? What are the options we have? The government tends to turn a deaf ear. We have to ask why it is not looking for a mechanism that would allow for this tool to be maximized for our seniors?

• (1050)

I challenge the government to seriously look at that and to look at bringing in the potential for amendments. I recognize we are already into the third reading stage, but maybe we could get the Senate to rectify this issue. Obviously the government has not been sensitive to that.

It makes sense. If we can allow our seniors to generate more income on their savings and allow the employers that put money to the side to generate more revenue for retiring seniors, why would we not do that?

If we look at what happens in other jurisdictions, we can see these types of funds have huge administrative costs and management fees. There is a good number of people who make huge profits and those profits are in essence taken away from seniors in their ability to maximize their pension benefits.

We are not necessarily against profits. We recognize where the Canada pension plan contributes and relies on profits. A structure is in place where there have been great savings, compared to other types of pooled registered pension plans.

That is why we suggest the government open its eyes and look at how CPP is administered and structured to see how we might be able to maximum the benefits of a pooled registered pension plan and maybe allow some of those agents that manage the CPP an opportunity to deal with this pooled registered pension plan, at the end of the day believing that seniors will benefit.

The issues of pensions is very important nowadays. It is on the minds of a lot of Canadians because the government seems to be fixated on creating a crisis with respect to our OAS. The government has suggested Canadians not retire at age 65 but wait until age 67. That has sent significant shock waves through our communities.

From the perspective of the area that I represent, Winnipeg North, when the Prime Minister was overseas, musing about what he wanted to do with pension plans and the pensions of seniors, it was somewhat insensitive to the day-to-day decisions seniors had to make. Some of those decisions deal with things such as whether they should pass on lunch to buy medicine, or whether they have enough money to take their grandchildren out to a special event.

Seniors face some serious financial issues today in a very real and tangible way. They are looking for leadership from the Government of Canada. What they want to hear from the government is that it truly cares. They want it to provide hope for individuals as they get closer to retirement.

When I look at Bill C-25, I will give the government some credit. It proposes to expand the tool box of what some seniors might be able to look at, including working with good employers that recognize the value of pensions. However, the bottom line is we need to think about pensions a lot more than we are, and we need to look at a wide variety—

• (1055)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Yukon.

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it was not perfectly clear to me if the member intends to support the legislation. I ask that with all sincerity. Is it the position of the Liberals that because it is not enough, they will not support the bill, or can he recognize, as he did toward the end of his comments, that it is a step and a tool that is moving forward? If the Liberals look at it from that perspective, would they support it and then continue to work with parliamentarians to find additional solutions to improve the chances of Canadians for long-term prosperity?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, it may be perfectly clear, as I believe I would have been in second reading, that what I like about the bill is it shows that there is a difference between all three political parties. We in the Liberal Party see this as a valuable tool and therefore will vote in favour of the legislation.

However, we also want Canadians to recognize that the government has dropped the ball in regard to the type of management fees that will be out there. A lot more dollars will go toward management fees than there need to be. Had the government looked at the structure for CPP and allowed CPP a larger role to play on the legislation, more money would have gone into the pockets of retiring seniors in the future. We would have liked to have seen incorporated into the bill.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.):** Madam Speaker, I am very disappointed to hear that the Liberals will support this very flawed notion of a pooled private system. I wonder if any of them, including that member, attended last spring when the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences hosted pension expert Keith Ambachtsheer for a big-thinking lecture series on the Hill. He is an internationally acknowledged expert on pensions. He made it very clear that we already had a superb system that operated at a tiny fraction of 1% in terms of administration fees, with guaranteed defined benefits at the end of the day, backed by government. He said it was a system that people could count on and that it was more effective and more efficient than a private system where the fees would be 2.5% to 4% or even more.

I ask the Liberals and that member to rethink this, go with the advice from the real experts in the field and not let any of our ideologies drive this. I ask them to look at the facts and the science behind it.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, having represented an area in the province of Manitoba for many years, one of the things I notice was the difference between the NDP in government versus the NDP in opposition. When NDP members are in government, they tend to think differently. NDP members in government tend to be closer to wanting to be Liberals and are more open-minded to allowing seniors the opportunity to have a multitude of ways in which they can invest in pensions.

I hope my friends in the NDP have many years of future success in opposition. I hope they retain the position in terms of withholding opportunities for seniors to really enjoy their retirement years by denying them what could potentially be a tool. However, not for every senior will benefit from this. That is why we have to ensure we stay on top of OAS, CPP and the GIS. This is to ensure that all seniors benefit.

However, let us not throw out good ideas or ideas that could be improved upon. Do not get me wrong, this bill can and should be improved upon. It does have a serious flaw, but keep in mind that there are thousands of small businesses across the country that like this legislation and many provincial jurisdictions accept it as a positive thing.

Therefore, we need to approach it with an open mind, but we need to keep in mind that the government dropped the ball in not allowing CPP to play a larger role. Canadians, as a whole, have a lot more confidence in CPP and OAS than any other pension program.

• (1100)

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise again to speak to Bill C-25, the pooled registered pension plans act.

First, I would like to respond to the last Liberal speaker. When I listened to him, I wondered if there were warning bells that there would be a merger between the NDP and Liberals. Maybe he was talking about that. I wish them the best of luck.

Coming back to the business of the pension plan, I will speak to the NDP position later on. Right now I will speak about the Liberal

position, which is typical. The Liberals are speaking out of both sides of their mouths. They like this, but they want to do that. What do they want to do?

Let me tell them this. They should not mislead Canadians when they speak about the CPP.

We should look at the CPP legislation. CPP can only be amended by the consensus of two-thirds of the provinces, representing two-thirds of the population. That is how one can change CPP, and not by what the Liberal Party has said. The Liberals can talk about anything they want, but it will not change the fact that CPP can only be changed when two-thirds of the provinces agree to change it. We should be honest about it.

The provincial finance ministers, at their 2010 meeting, had strong objections to changes to the CPP. Maybe the Liberals should take that fact into consideration. The provinces have a strong objection to changing CPP in the way in which the member keeps speaking about as a good way to change it. For that reason, they will support it but they want CPP.

Yet, as was pointed out, the NDP government in Manitoba is different from the federal NDP opposition. However, all provincial finance ministers agreed that this was the right way to go. I am sorry to say that the objections made by the Liberals against this bill hold no water. It is typical Liberal rhetoric. They are sitting on both sides of the fence.

I will talk about the NDP's opposition to the bill. The NDP is now a party with its head in the sand. I look at what the NDP leader has said. He has been talking about the Dutch disease, creating division between resource rich provinces and so-called manufacturing provinces, not understanding that resources and manufacturing are intertwined.

The provincial economies in Canada are intertwined. Yet the Leader of the Opposition is going around the country and talking about the Dutch disease, saying that the resource sector is destroying the economy of the province of Quebec where he was born. He said that it was destroying manufacturing jobs in Quebec. What narrow thinking. The NDP is aspiring to be the Government of Canada? That is the most dangerous scenario one can think about happening in our country.

If the Liberal members would like to join the NDP, I would ask them to think about this. Do they want to join a party that is sowing division in our country? We have one of the best mobility systems in the world, considering Canada's economic situation compared with other countries. We can move from eastern Canada to western Canada within days and have everything transferred.

We have an economic system that benefits the whole country. Yet, what did the NDP leader say? He is blasting the resource rich provinces. Now he has also changed and is hitting northern Ontario. He does not like the forestry sector there.

I can tell the House that he will quickly change his tune when it applies to his province of Quebec. What kind of leadership is being displayed by the so-called Leader of the Opposition, whom some have termed the "prime minister in waiting?"

*Government Orders*

•(1105)

As long as I am on this side, we will fight tooth and nail to make sure Canadians understand how divisive that party is. That is why it comes as no surprise that the NDP opposes this legislation. When the NDP opposes something, we know we are on the right track.

Let me get back to talking about the pooled registered retirement. Those who have a business background know the value of having this pooled registered pension plan.

My wife ran a business for 15 years. I worked for the city and helped her with her business. I had a government pension plan then and I have a government pension plan even now, and so do many Canadians. Canadians who work for big corporations have a pension plan. After putting 15 years of hard labour into her business, my wife has no pension because there was no vehicle available to her. All she can do is put money into RRSPs to help her out with her pension planning because that is her only vehicle. When I talked to her about this pooled plan, she wanted to know why nobody had brought this idea forward before. Why did it take so long?

All provinces unanimously support this. Not all Canadians will benefit from this plan, but it will reach those people who have been left out, who do not have any other tools like we have. This plan would fill the crack in their retirement planning.

This plan is a strong tool. It would allow a portion of Canadians, those who are self-employed and those who cannot enter into this, the opportunity to have another vehicle for their long-term retirement plan. What is wrong with that picture? I do not understand what those members find wrong with that.

I hear members talking about the fee, saying they think it would be high. Let me get this straight. Those members are going to oppose a very good plan that would benefit thousands of Canadians because they think the fee would be high. Let me be clear. They do not have any proof that it would be high.

This plan would be based on experience, based on pooled resources and based on this being under an act of legislation. Those would ensure we get the best money for this pension plan. In the long term it would help thousands of Canadians in their retirement, which is key.

The opposition will fearmonger again about our government raising the retirement age from 65 to 67 to qualify for OAS. That does not apply to those who are currently getting it or will be getting it in the near future. We have to look at the long term.

On June 2, I will have been in the House for 15 years. When I was on the other side, we debated the Canada pension plan when the issue was raised by the government of the day. At that time, the Liberals sat on this side of the House. We changed to reflect the increase. We recognized that the Canada pension plan needed to be changed because otherwise it would not be there in the long term for Canadians.

Today, instead of raising the premiums, which would impact the fragile economic recovery, all we are saying is that the age be deferred from 65 to 67. This would apply to the younger population. This would provide them with enough time and tools to continue to

build a retirement savings plan, which would be there for them when they retire. The plan will not be bankrupt.

•(1110)

To the Liberal who keeps talking about seniors, I am telling him to use the word correctly, when he is talking about 65 to 70. This is for the younger generation coming up. The current seniors and the seniors we will be getting in the next short period of time are not impacted. However, that is not what he is going to talk about because it does not fit into his agenda.

However, I am happy to note, irrespective of whatever they say, at least they will vote with us, so that by itself is a positive factor.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Madam Speaker, it is always with great humour that we welcome the comments of the hon. member opposite. What we want to do is defend the middle class, the people who are in need.

This bill contains no real incentive for self-employed workers, for non-standard workers who have been increasing in numbers over the past 15 years because this government, like the previous one, has been incapable of creating stable jobs. What he and his colleague said is rather infuriating, namely, that it could help everyone and that it would be voluntary. Sure, but this bill takes so much responsibility away from the employer, there is no incentive. I stress the word “incentive”.

How will part-time and contract workers be encouraged to contribute to it? And, furthermore, all it is going to do is that, in 2020 or whatever year, they will have to retire at age 67 instead of age 65. How can people find real incentive in that and how will the employer be involved and accountable for the amounts that will be invested in the pooled fund?

[*English*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Madam Speaker, he talked about humour. Let me talk about the humour he is talking about when he says they are there to defend the middle class. Amazingly, how is the NDP going to defend the middle class when it is fighting the natural resources, talking about a Dutch disease? He is talking about damaging the economy, putting divisive policies in the country, which will have a very negative impact on the whole economy of the country.

He should first get the facts right before he starts getting up and saying the NDP is going to defend the middle class. The way the NDP is going, there will be nothing left to defend anyway.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member. Just to pick up on one of them in regard to the whole divisiveness, is the Leader of the Opposition very divisive, not very considerate to westerners? I am a westerner. I too was quite offended by his attack on premiers out west.

Having said that, when we talk about CPP, the member said that requires all provinces to come to the table and come up with an agreement to improve CPP, two-thirds, as has been pointed out. That is why I said it is important in my comments.

*Government Orders*

Seniors today are looking to Ottawa to see national leadership, a prime minister who is prepared to sit at a table and work with premiers. I am not suggesting he behave in the same fashion as the leader of the official opposition, but I am suggesting he sit down and demonstrate leadership in working on what is an important issue to all seniors in Canada, and that is to enhance programs like CPP. If he is not prepared to sit down with them and work with them in good faith, then agreement will never be achieved.

• (1115)

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Madam Speaker, in answer to his question, yes, in the 2010 meeting with the finance ministers, the government, through the Minister of State for Finance, my good colleague from Okotoks, met with the finance ministers of our country, all of them. They raised a strong objection. Once they raised the strong objection, it was very clear to us that we needed to find another method for going forward.

Therefore, to answer his question whether we met with the provinces, yes, we did.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I rise to debate this particular legislation. I noticed my colleague in his speech pretty well stuck with the topic of the economy rather than actually speaking to this rather insignificant and poorly designed bill that the government put forward. I do not blame him for doing that, because that is the case.

The Conservatives will say that, by bringing forward the bill, they have created something seniors. That is a very minor element and much of what is proposed in the bill can already be accomplished.

When I was mayor of a little town, Fort Smith, we did not have a pension plan for our employees, but we did have a plan by which they could have a certain amount deducted from their paycheque to go into RRSPs for their use once they had finished their working careers.

These types of arrangement can be made by companies. They were made by the community government I represented as mayor, and they carried forward. Were they successful? They were reasonably successful in some ways, but in other ways, because they were not mandatory but voluntary, they did not include a lot of issues. The municipality itself took the time to even enhance the value of these RRSPs, but still we found that many of the employees simply did not have the facility. They needed the money for their everyday life and did not participate in the program to the extent that we would have thought would have been appropriate.

When we have these voluntary programs for employees who, in this day of Conservative economics, are getting less and less in their pay pocket at the end of the day, a voluntary program to encourage them to save for retirement seems rather difficult for them in many cases because they simply need the money to survive in this world.

What we have is a program that may work for some people, but it is not a nation-building program that deserves the recognition of Parliament, that deserves the time and effort the government has put on Parliament to create. If this is the best it can do, it is certainly not adequate for Canadians, and that is what we see.

We compare this pooled program to other programs around the world that do the same thing. Is there mandatory participation by

employers? In Canada, there is not; in New Zealand, yes; in the United Kingdom, yes; in Australia, yes.

Is there auto enrolment by employees? In the case of Canada, provided the employer chooses to offer a plan to that class of employees, there is an auto enrolment, but the employee has an opting out opportunity within 60 days for notifications for new PRPPs.

Is there mandatory employer contribution? There is not; but in all three other programs we are looking at, yes, yes, yes. Is there a minimum employer contribution? In Canada there is none; in New Zealand, 2%; in the United Kingdom, 3%; in Australia, 9%. Is there a minimum employee contribution? In Canada there is none; in New Zealand, 2%; in the United Kingdom, 4%; in Australia, none.

The government contribution is tax relief. In other cases, in Australia they top up by \$1,000; there is an annual tax credit in New Zealand of \$1,000. Are there provisions to allow employees to suspend contributions? Yes, and that is similar within the programs. Are employees restricted to a single lifetime savings plan? This is important, because in Canada the answer is no, in New Zealand, yes, and in the other two countries, no. However, we found with Australia's not having a single program and not having the ability to transfer programs that this causes a mushrooming number of savings accounts, and it emerged as a significant problem in Australia's superannuation program.

• (1120)

By June 2010, there were 32.9 million super pension accounts in Australia, an average of three accounts per employee and almost double the number 15 years before. Many of them are inactive or are lost member accounts. It is a program that really does not work all that well when there are seasonal employees or employees moving from one business to another.

We have seen voluntary pension pairing plans and pooled registered pension plans around the world and the one that is proposed by the Conservative government seems very weak. It seems to be mostly window dressing on things that could be accomplished and carried forward in a good fashion with the existing legislation and pension opportunities.

We want to see something that is more universal and expands opportunities for the universal Canada pension plan, that raises contribution levels and creates greater defined benefits so people will know they have surety in their retirement and that they can work to the age of 65 and retire with dignity. Now the Conservatives are changing that as well by raising the age of retirement, not for those who are seniors now but for young people who will be entering the system. By young, I mean people under 50 years old, not really young, but they will see that change come about.

*Government Orders*

What is the reaction within the population? We are seeing that seniors are moving to the NDP in greater and greater numbers across the country because seniors understand what it means when the age of retirement is changed from 65 to 67. They do not want to burden their children and grandchildren with that additional cost when the additional cost to the government turns out to be not that bad. It turns out that the Conservatives are overinflating the costs and creating panic in the system when the panic in the system does not need to happen. The Conservatives are once again living to their name: cons. They are working the Canadian public like we are rubes but seniors are not buying it. They are moving away from the Conservatives in droves right now because they understand the reality of what the government is doing.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Not the seniors in my riding.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** One only has to look at the polling numbers to see that seniors are moving away from the Conservatives.

Why are they doing that after the Conservatives introduced this notion of changing the retirement age from 65 to 67? It is because the seniors in this country understand what that means. People who are at the age of retirement understand what the Conservatives will be doing to their children and grandchildren, and they do not like it. I do not blame them. Fair is fair in this country. We have a system that says that the retirement age is 65, so let us keep it there. We need to make the adjustments on what it costs to maintain that program, not this tricky little measure of trying to promote it by saying that it is not really happening right now so people do not have to worry about it. What is that all about?

We are here to make measured and careful decisions for the future of this country. The government is definitely doing that in a bad fashion. It should be held to account and will be by this side of the House going forward over the next three years until we can get rid of it.

• (1125)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, one could emphasize the importance of providing for our aging population and looking for tools to assist seniors in their elderly years and those who would like to retire at 65 and quite often even younger than that.

My question for the member is with regard to the government in Manitoba, which happens to be a New Democratic government. The Government of Canada has made it clear on several occasions that the provincial NDP government in Manitoba actually supports this legislation. Does the member know if that is true or false?

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Madam Speaker, I would need to examine when the so-called endorsement of this took place, what particular details were laid out by the Conservative government to the Province of Manitoba, when it understood the nature of what was going on here and whether it accepted it simply because that was all that was being offered.

I am not standing here in Parliament to promote things that are only half good for Canadians, a quarter good for Canadians or things that are already available to Canadians under the existing law. That is

not why I am here. I am here in the hope that I can provide a better vision for where we can go with this country in the future.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Madam Speaker, if I understood the hon. member, he is questioning the competency of the Government of Manitoba by saying that it did not know the full results, that it did not get this thing.

I cannot believe a member in this House would get up and say that the Government of Manitoba does not have the full facts and that it made a decision sitting in the darkness. Amazingly, it is the same concept that his leader, the leader of the official opposition, used when he talked about Dutch disease. It is pitting one province against another, which damages the whole economy of Canada. If the whole economy of Canada is damaged, how does he expect to help Canadians?

It is amazing to hear the NDP members say that they do not like and now they are talking about how other Canadians do not have the expertise or do not have what they believe in. What an amazing—

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

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Madam Speaker, I am incredulous at the member across who, after having heard the debate over the F-35 fiasco, is telling me that somehow the government has given the facts on anything correctly to any other group in this country.

The government has a record of totally obfuscating financing issues and of presenting things in such a fashion. I refer back to the budget implementation bill, when the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development said that the bill would raise the borrowing limit for the Government of Northwest Territories when it was doing no such thing.

How can we believe anything the government says? How can we understand anything it presented to the provinces six months or a year ago?

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Madam Speaker, many of my constituents would love to have a pension plan, but they are struggling to make ends meet from week to week. How would this particular scheme help those who are struggling from week to week?

• (1130)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Madam Speaker, as I outlined, compared to other pooled pension plans across the world, this plan is very much remiss in this regard. Even with those plans, many people found that their contribution was left in an account and was turned into nothing.

This is something that has not been addressed in this bill. This bill is inadequate and flawed, and does not need to be passed.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, we are discussing retirement security. Our people are getting older and living longer. What does this mean to our retirement system and what should we do about it?

I will start with some incredible facts.

*Government Orders*

In 1951, when the old age security system was put in place, life expectancy was age 69 and the age of eligibility was 70, meaning that the average person would not live long enough to collect old age security at all.

Today, the average life expectancy is 82 and eligibility starts at 65, meaning that people, on average, will collect OAS for 17 years.

Back in 1975, there were seven taxpayers for every one senior. Right now, there are four taxpayers for every senior. In two decades, there will only be two taxpayers for every senior.

As we move forward, life expectancy is growing by 47 days per year. That means that in two decades the average person will live until he or she turns 84, which means that under the existing rules of old age security he or she will collect for almost two decades.

Put together, these facts mean that in two decades the number of people collecting OAS will double, the cost of the program will triple and the number of taxpayers supporting each retiree will fall by half. By consequence, OAS will rise from 15¢ on every dollar the federal government spends to 25¢ on every dollar the federal government spends.

According to the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, on the current trajectory of demographics and program spending, the government will have a shortfall of \$67 billion annually in today's dollars by the year 2040.

We should think of OAS as a glass of water. Retirees can only drink out of the glass in benefits what workers pay in taxes. If retirees are drinking out faster than taxpayers are paying in somebody goes thirsty. We have seen the costs of drinking from the glass of profligacy in places like Greece and Portugal. In order to avoid that kind of financial drought, we have put in a plan to make the system affordable and sustainable by gradually raising the age of eligibility from 65 to 67 starting in the year 2023. People over the age of 54 will not be affected in any way, shape or form by these changes. Those under the age of 54 have a lot of time to plan for these changes.

That addresses some of the cost problems with old age security but there is another problem with our retirement system, that being that 60% of Canadians do not have a workplace pension. That is because many of their employers are too small to afford the cost of assembling their own defined benefit or defined contribution system.

I will use the example of a couple named Joe and Martha. One is a manager at a restaurant and the other works at a corner store. Both of them would love to have the ability to save for the future in an employer-based pension plan but neither of their employers are large enough to manage such a plan on their behalf. As a result, they only have RRSPs to supplement the government income programs that exist. However, because they find investing on their own to be too intimidating and the markets too mercurial for their risk profile, they do not save for the future.

• (1135)

Imagine if thousands of workers like Joe and Martha could pool their risks and share the management costs of an employer-based pension plan through a pooled system. That is exactly what we are proposing.

The design of these plans would be straightforward with simple enrolment and management. A third-party administrator, normally a bank, insurance company or pension plan, would be responsible for the administrative and legal duties. What a relief for the small business owners. These plans would also be subject to the standard pension rules that exist for plans across the sector right now, unlike RRSPs which have no similar standard regulatory practice.

The opposition opposes giving small businesses the ability to join together and pool their resources to provide their employees with a pension for their retirement. Instead, it proposes massive new government entitlements. Not only do opposition members fail to deal with the existing \$67 billion shortfall that will result based on existing demographics and policies, they propose to stack billions of dollars in new promises.

For example, the deputy leader of the NDP and the leader of the Liberal Party have both moved and seconded bills that would make people who have lived in this country for only three years eligible for OAS when the rest of Canadians have to pay their whole lives in taxes in order to afford that benefit. That would raise the cost of OAS and exacerbate the shortfall that exists in the current system.

How would they pay for it all? Well, they say they will tax big business. What businesses are they referring to? Maybe they mean Canadian Natural Resources Limited, the country's largest independent oil and gas producer with over 100,000 barrels out of the oil sands each day; a perfect target for the NDP and Liberals.

The NDP proposes to raise taxes on that company's profits, but where do those profits go right now? Right now, they go to the shareholders, one of the largest being the Quebec pension plan, which is Quebec's equivalent of the CPP. The dividends that Canadian Natural Resources Limited pays to the Quebec pension plan today are enough to cover the full pension requirements of 1,100 Quebecers every single year. If we raised taxes on Canadian Natural Resources Limited, we would reduce the dividends it pays out to its shareholders, one of the largest being Quebec pensioners. Here we have the NDP proposing to raise taxes on a public pension plan. One wonders where its priorities lie.

CPP is the same way. Over half of its assets are invested in companies like the Canadian Oil Sands, Suncor Energy, Imperial Oil and Athabasca Oil Sands. The Canada Post pension plan's top five holdings are the Toronto-Dominion Bank, the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank of Nova Scotia, Suncor and Canadian Natural Resources Limited. Banks and oil companies, the twin villains in every left-wing storyline, are the ones that are paying the dividends into the Canada Post pension plan. To increase taxes on those companies, dividends would be reduced to the postal workers' pension fund.

What happened to solidarity forever? The truth is, there can be no solidarity when one's entire narrative is based on dividing us and them and believe that the only way for one person to prosper is for another person to fail.

*Government Orders*

In this country, the mail man relies on the profitability of the energy companies in order to have his pension cheque. We are all in this together. Through a symbiotic system of free market economics, the success of one is the success of all. We have a shared destiny, a common future, a united Canada. That is how we succeed, by sticking together and standing for what is right. That is the formula for this government.

• (1140)

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Madam Speaker, sometimes it is hard to sit here and listen to the rhetoric. There is an implication here, in my hon. colleague's presentation, that seniors in this country do not pay taxes. I can tell members that many seniors, in my generation and others, are paying their share of taxes. Just because they retire does not mean they stop paying taxes, and we have to remember that whenever we start expounding numbers.

My question for my colleague is very straightforward. For families who are struggling to make ends meet, families who, because of the policies of the government, are now working two or three jobs at \$10 to \$12 an hour and each month their only intention is to get to the end of the month and put food on the table, how does the member think this plan is going to put pension security on the table?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Madam Speaker, the member says seniors are paying too much tax and she is right. A recent study showed that Canadians spend more on taxes than they do on food, clothing and shelter combined.

Let us look at the cup. The NDP wants to drink out of the cup of profligacy again and again. It wants a government-run daycare program, \$15 billion. It wants to give OAS to people who have only lived in Canada for three years, \$700 million. It wants a 45 day work year, so a person only has to go to work for 45 days and then collect EI for the rest of the year, another \$6 billion. I could stand here all day and talk about the ways the NDP would drink out of the cup of profligacy with the spending promises it makes.

However, what the NDP members forget is that somebody has to pour back into the cup in order for it to be replenished and that somebody inevitably is seniors, through higher taxes. She is the one who has to explain why she would raise taxes on seniors to pay for all of this irresponsible spending.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I always find it interesting when the member provides all these factual numbers. The question I have is one of credibility. The parliamentary secretary says that today we spend 15¢ on every Canadian tax dollar. Then he says that if we do not make these changes we are going to be spending 25¢ of every tax dollar on the OAS program. I do not buy it. I just do not believe the numbers that the member is telling Canadians. In fact, I would suggest that the government has created this crisis situation.

We have heard from professionals, statisticians and actuaries. They have made it very clear that Canada as a government can afford to keep providing seniors the option to retire at 65, that the age of eligibility does not have to go to 67 and is not going to be this huge burden. Why should Canadians believe that if it does not change,

that it is going to go from 15¢ on every dollar to 25¢ on every dollar, when the member himself likely knows that—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Madam Speaker, why should they believe it? Because the number of retirees collecting OAS will double, the cost of the program will triple and the number of taxpayers supporting each retiree will fall by half. These are unavoidable statistics that members can access by going to Statistics Canada's website.

The average person now lives 47 days longer than the average person last year. That will continue into the future, meaning longer lifespans and more collection of OAS. The reality is that we cannot have a situation where we have two people carrying one person on their shoulders, in addition to all the other social obligations that our tax dollars fund. These are inescapable mathematical realities.

We have seen the member's vision. It is called Greece. We choose here Conservative economics, not Liberal Greeconomics.

• (1145)

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am very glad to rise today on behalf of the residents of York South—Weston, who sent me here to look after them and to try to make sense of what the government is doing.

One of those residents, a young fellow named Scott Jackson, finished in the top 12 in the *Canada's Got Talent* show last week. We want to congratulate him for being such a great self-employed musician. I say self-employed musician because those are the kinds of people who are going to suffer most from the kinds of policies and practices the government is putting forward to try to deal with the future of the retirement scheme in Canada.

First and foremost, people like Scott are going to work until they are 67, make no doubt about it. The minister may say people have time to prepare for that, which means they are going to save more money, but that is not unless they can earn more money. They cannot earn more money in the systems we have today, when the government is telling employers they can now bring people from other countries and ask them to work for 15% less than the people who are currently working in Canada.

It makes no sense. The government is driving down wages as quickly as it can. It is working hard to prevent organized labour from getting any further in the wage battles in this country. Its friends, the CEOs and captains of industry, are doing quite well. I do not see any 15% regulation for CEOs of big corporations, or calls for them to be replaced by temporary foreign workers. That is the reality the Conservatives put forward.



*Government Orders*

I am going to call this a scheme, because that is really what it is. The suggestion that this scheme of pooled registered retirement plans will somehow be the solution is just looking at the world through such rose-coloured glasses as to be laughable. If one wants to be generous to the government, it is perhaps an addition to an arsenal of possible retirement schemes, but it is really fundamentally no different from what is already there, except in the ability to pool. There is already a registered retirement savings plan scheme and a tax-free savings account scheme, which most Canadians cannot afford to contribute to. In fact, 74% of Canadians do not put money into RRSPs, and yet 60% of Canadians, as the minister opposite already stated, do not have a workplace pension plan.

The number of workplace pension plans is actually going down, and they are being converted, as we speak, from defined benefit plans to defined contribution plans in record numbers. Employers across the land are discovering they can no longer afford to continue the good, solid, defined benefit plans that are similar to the Canada pension plan and were supposed to work in tandem with it.

The systems that current and previous governments have put in place make it impossible for employers to deal with the huge deficits these plans rolled up. These deficits are not caused by some kind of structural problem with the defined benefits system. They are caused by the abnormally low interest rates that we have in this country, which are forcing employers to put huge amounts of money into pension plans for a potential windup of those plans. It is not likely to happen. If a company continues to exist and is profitable, it will continue to contribute into that defined benefit plan.

The windup costs become enormous. As soon as one tries to buy annuities, with the windup of a pension plan, one has to come up with enormous sums of money, so employers all over this country are dropping them like hot potatoes. The government has not provided them any relief. There has been no discussion by the government to find a way around this, to make it possible to preserve the system of a combination of the Canada pension plan, OAS and a defined benefit plan in an employer setting. Those are the three pillars of what we have now. Two of them are under attack and the third is being left stagnant.

● (1150)

The NDP has a plan. The NDP plan is to suggest that the Canada pension plan is so successful that it should be doubled. It is clearly the cheapest, the most reliable and the most sustainable form of pension in our country. The Canada pension plan, which is a type of defined benefit plan that is a recognition of years of service times wages, which is how most good pension plans in our country are calculated, provides a portion of what is intended to be the pension regime for Canadians when they retire.

One portion is the old age security, one portion is the Canada pension plan and the third portion is either personal savings or a workplace defined benefit plan. Because 60% of Canadians do not have a workplace pension plan, and a number of those Canadians are now in workplace pension plans that are precarious and dependent upon the stock markets, and if people happen to retire at the wrong time and the stock markets are down, woe betide them, they will not be able to retire.

We have not come up with an overall scheme. The government has put a band-aid on a scheme that needs something more than a band-aid. The only thing it has proposed is kind of like a bigger group RRSP. It still has the same precarious nature, depending on market forces for its success. It still has the issue of no mandatory provision to it, so people do not have to belong and do not have to contribute. It has no requirement for the employer to contribute.

With those three things missing, with those three things being a problem with this pooled system, it is a bad system. It may suit a very small minority of Canadians and a small minority of Canadian corporations, companies, businesses, owners that have no other alternative. However, if that is going to be the case, the better solution is to double Canada pension, gradually over time.

The Conservatives call it another tax. It is not a tax; it is a pension. It has nothing to do with taxing anybody. It is a way of maintaining a pension. If we are suggesting employers are contributing already to the Canada pension plan and that over time those contributions should double so Canadians who have no other alternatives will at least have something sensible to retire on, a portion of money that comes from a Canada pension, let us think of the downstream benefits to that.

First, it will reduce poverty. Reducing poverty is a good thing. Second, it will reduce the government's reliance on guaranteed income supplement. If Canadians have a doubled Canada pension plan and old age security, fewer and fewer of them would need that government handout.

We are making the future more sustainable through a present that looks forward. That is not what the government is doing. The government is trying to scare Canadians by suggesting that somehow the old age security system we now have is unsustainable and that this in combination with the guaranteed income supplement will bankrupt the country.

That is the absolute furthest from the truth. Yes, there is a slight bump when the baby boomers retire, but the plan allows those baby boomers to all retire anyway and continue to collect OAS. Therefore, the bump is not being dealt with. This belies the fact that the government considers this to be a problem.

By the time we get around to implementing the government's plan, we will be on the downward slope of the baby boomers and we will end up with a sustainable system again. The plan is crazy. It is not an effective way to create sustainability in our pension system.

We in the NDP have determined that the best way to go forward, and the best way for the sustainability of the entire system, is to double the Canada pension plan. The government is not doing that. The government is suggesting that we should put our money into more personally risky investments. As long as that is the case, as long as there is a personal risk, then it is a roll of the dice on which year to retire. If people retire in a bear market, well, too bad, so sad, they will run out of pension.

*Government Orders*

•(1155)

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, we have had a lot of issues in common when it comes to our desire to improve our pension system. However, when he talks about the NDP plan to double the Canada pension plan, which is very admirable, this would have a huge impact upon Canadians and businesses.

Does he not have consideration for the impact that would have upon our business community if the NDP were to become government and decided that it would double the taxes, which is effectively what it would be?

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, this is not a tax. This is in fact a pension.

What we are suggesting is that over time, gradually giving people time to prepare, the Canada pension plan should be increased. It is by far the most effective and most consistent form of pension in our country.

The Ontario Liberal government in 2007 reacted exactly the same way when it was suggested that the minimum wage in Ontario should go from \$7.00 to over \$10.00. It said that businesses would fail, that it would be a huge burden on businesses to raise the minimum wage. That was not the case. It did not happen.

The kind of fear-mongering that goes on when we talk about this as a tax, which it is not, when we talk about this as somehow harmful to business is wrong and has the same illogic as suggesting that the minimum wage in Ontario would kill business, which it did not do, and which eventually the Liberal government adopted.

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have enjoyed the debate today because it is a very important one, not just for us now, but for future generations of Canadians.

It was an interesting question from my colleague in the Liberal Party. If she looks at CPP and doubling it perhaps over the next 10 years, 12 years or whatever the case might be, it is not a tax; it is an investment. That is where we need to come from.

However, my question is for my friend from Toronto. He talked about risk in a pooled retirement savings plan. We have a real life example? Many people who had RRSPs in 2008 found out they had lost 30%, 35% of the value of their RRSPs. We know they are risky. Would my friend like to make comment further on that?

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** Madam Speaker, there is a two-fold risk to having our money in a vehicle in which we must actually make the decisions about how to invest it and, at the end, about how to take it out of the plan.

We are at a situation right now in Canada where the stock market has not performed the way it did in the 1980s and 1990s. It has certainly not been the pillar that it ought to have been. People did wake up one day and discovered that their portfolios were worth sometimes as much as 50% less. Add to that the fact that interest rates are at historic lows in our country. When we take that money out, we get nothing in return. Now when people go to one of these friendly insurance companies to buy an annuity, they discover that they are lucky if they get \$600 a month or \$500 a month. Ten or

fifteen years ago, when interest rates were at 5% and 6%, for \$100,000 they could get \$1,200 a month.

Those two things are combining together to make that kind of pension plan a disaster for persons who wish to retire.

•(1200)

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am sure the member will have an opportunity to ask some further questions since he seemed dismayed that his colleague's time was up.

When I last spoke to Bill C-25 on this issue, I expressed my concern that this was little more than breadcrumbs to a starving person. I supported it going to committee, as did our party, with the hope that some significant changes would be made to improve some part of what the government had called pension reform.

Bill C-25 is still nothing more than a mechanism for those who have money to save for their retirement and the government trying to pass it off as its answer to pension reform.

While I have no difficulties with creating savings vehicles, in fact we need to do more of that, we must also work to help those who have little means to save. Pension reform should be all about that. Bill C-25 is not pension reform and any claim that it is false, misleading and deceptive.

For the sake of clarity, it is still my intention to vote for Bill C-25 because it is a breadcrumb to a starving person. It is as simple as that and nothing more than that. It will not satisfy the demand, but perhaps it will offer a small portion of temporary relief to some. Therefore, I will cast my vote with deep concern for what this legislation fails to do.

PRPPs are nothing but locked-in RRSPs and Canadians will face a number of problems if they choose to join these plans. Members will bear 100% of the investment risk. A single market stumble could spell the end to any retirement hopes. There is also no ability to make up for the bad years by making additional tax deductible contributions. They will have to become administrators of their own plans and there is no ability to move out of an underperforming PRPP into a performing one or one that will offer better services.

Employers will be forced to create administrative systems to enrol their members. If provinces make them mandatory, then since both employers and members can opt out, they may incur a significant amount of costs for absolutely no reason.

It is still unclear whether any homemakers would be able to contribute or would it have to be from employment income only? Yet again, the so-called Conservative plan excludes those who contribute to society outside of the traditional workforce.

*Government Orders*

Why not learn from some of the others who have tried plans like the PRPPs that are being proposed today. Australia tried it well over a decade ago, in 1997. It was published in the Rotman International Journal of Pension Management. It found that the only ones who benefited from the plan were those in the financial sector. The study concluded that the Australian superannuation system was founded on the assumption that market competition would deliver economic efficiency in a largely private, defined contribution system. That did not work.

Management fees are a significant problem. PRPPs will be managed by the very same people who manage Canada's mutual funds, and Canadians already pay some of the highest management fees in the world on their mutual funds.

Morningstar released a report grading 22 countries on the management expense ratios levied on their mutual funds. Canada was the only country to receive an F. Why should we be striving for an F? I, like most, think we should be striving for an A. It would make far more sense.

The government already knows all of this. It was specifically raised in January when Bill C-25 was last before the House. The standing committee knew this too, which is why I am shocked it reported back to the House without any suggestions for improvement and without any insights of any kind, in spite of having a variety of individuals go before the finance committee and suggest some amendments and some ways to improve Bill C-25, clearly because Canada needs serious pension reform.

The standing committee was silent, despite witness testimony that said, "in its current form, Bill C-25 is an example of good intentions, creating a legislative response that will have numerous unintended adverse consequences". Witnesses also stated that as an effective pension plan, pooled plans were unlikely to achieve that goal.

• (1205)

Expert witnesses at committee begged the government to make even minor changes, again because we need to move forward as a country on pension reform. They said:

There is a considerable body of academic work that shows that putting untrained and uninterested individuals in charge of investment selection is foolish.... If investing money was a simple matter, we'd all be rich. The reality is that investing is challenging, even for professionals, and that it remains to be a full-time job.

The world is becoming increasingly complex, financial innovation continually challenges practitioners and to expect Canadians to suddenly have the time required and the skill needed to manage money carefully is unfair and, to be blunt, ill-advised.

Despite all these warnings, the government had ordered its MPs on the finance committee to ignore all of that good advice and to vote down any amendments from the opposition.

We had suggested several amendments. At second reading the Liberal caucus said, and I led that discussion, that we wanted to work with the government to make Bill C-25 more effective. At the committee we introduced an amendment to address some of the problems raised by the witnesses. All of our amendments were defeated along party lines.

Specifically, the Liberal finance critic presented an amendment that would have addressed the issue of high management fees. Why would the government defeat it? The government decided that

Canadians should be cast to the markets without any form of protection, despite the warnings coming from experts on the subject. In simple language, this means that investors, average Canadians interested in the PRPPs, would be legally required to pay fees that would guarantee a profit for the bank. That sounds to me like an inefficient way of delivering pensions.

These requirements are the cornerstone of the PRPP plan. With this in mind, I am left to wonder how PRPPs could possibly yield results for Canadians and pensioners. The simple answer is that PRPPs would not help the average Canadian prepare for retirement, just as millions of Canadians have not been able to max out their RRSPs.

Forcing Canadians to work longer and harder to save for retirement on top of asking them to pay for \$6 billion in giveaways to the largest corporations, \$13 billion for new megaprisons and \$40 billion for an untendered stealth fighter jet deal is not a plan for pensions. PRPPs will not work for those who need them the most.

Why are we not learning from some of the mistakes of other countries? Australia adopted its version of PRPPs over a decade ago, in 1997. The recent study that I alluded to earlier, done by the Rotman International Journal of Pension Management, found that the only benefit from that plan went to the financial services industry.

Why not look at other options? Let me tell the House a bit about the Liberal option. A supplemental Canada pension plan, already proposed by the Liberals, would provide the best of both worlds. It would create a new retirement savings vehicle for Canadians who need it, while delivering the low overhead cost structure of the Canada pension plan.

A supplementary Canada pension would be a simple cost-effective solution to the pension question facing our country. It would be a defined benefit pension for everyone, even those who have left the workforce during their lives for child rearing, illness, seasonal employment and educational advancement. It would use proven and existing resources to give every Canadian man, woman and child a reliable and stable investment vehicle for the future. A supplementary Canada pension would be a plan for real pension reform.

The Conservatives could not care less. By ignoring the amendments that we had put forward, by ignoring our good intention of trying to work with the government on making changes to Bill C-25, the government is clearly showing that it has no interest in the idea that Canadians should have anybody help them to save money.

The government's fend-for-yourself attitude that we see every day in the House continues. Bill C-25 is just another example of good intentions but failed legislation.

*Government Orders*

●(1210)

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, that was an impressive and thoughtful analysis. I learned a lot. It is quite clear that the hon. member does not really think much of Bill C-25. She thinks it is a poor substitute for enhancing our current CPP system.

Given the great job that my colleague has done in showing how the bill is not very good, I am wondering why the Liberals intend to vote for it at this time.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, we have had many discussions about is it this or is it that. At the end of the day I think it is going to be another piece of failed legislation that was perhaps introduced to derail the discussion about OAS and the rest of it, because this measure is really not going to help anyone save money.

At the end of the day, what does it do? It gives bread crumbs to a starving man. It is a little step forward on the issue of pension reform. It is inadequate, but there will be a few Canadians who will go forward with this plan.

I think it is better than nothing at all. Bill C-25 will provide an opportunity for a few Canadians to start thinking more about putting money away for their retirement. We want to move the issue forward and we know we need pension reform, so we will allow this tiny piece of legislation go forward. I suspect that the government will see that it is not what it thought it would be and hopefully will really start to look at pension reform in Canada in the future.

**Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in a follow-up to the last question, I wonder if the member could actually define what “a few Canadians” actually amounts to? Are you talking ten, a thousand, hundreds of thousands? You have left it open to interpretation, and I think you need to be honest with your constituents and the rest of Canadians right across the country.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Just before I go to the member for York West, I would remind all hon. members to address their comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for York West.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, it depends on what one calls success in relation to a piece of legislation. PRPPs will be put out there and advertised by banks and insurance companies as the greatest saviour for Canadians. At the end of the day, success will be gauged on how many Canadians participate in the program, given that both employers and employees realize that high management fees are built into that program and that the banks and insurance companies will be able to get their management fees out of it even if the individual loses.

It will all depend on what one would call “a few Canadians”. Based on all the information I have received, I do not think there will be a huge take-up. It is a flawed piece of legislation, but there will be a few, and the member can figure out what “a few” is. Since the government talks about a billion here and there, I suppose a few could be a few thousand, but I doubt very much that there will be a huge take-up once Canadians realize that they are on the hook for huge management fees.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in my colleague's questioning to me, she referred to the notion that

the Canada pension plan is a tax or is hurtful to employers. However, we have discovered over the past 60 years of pension system history in Canada that if it is not mandatory for employers and employees to contribute, a large section of our populace does not, or cannot, save for retirement. Given that this plan is voluntary, what does she have to say about mandatory increases to the Canada pension plan?

●(1215)

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Madam Speaker, thank goodness we have the Canada pension plan, which was brought in by a Liberal government. Without it I would hate to imagine what would be happening today to the thousands of Canadians who rely on the Canada pension, given the fact that the government is going to make people wait two extra years to get OAS.

Part of what we recommend is a gradual increase in the Canada pension plan. When we are talking about all these changes, it sounds wonderful to simply say that we should double the Canada pension. If we could ultimately get to that on a very slow, gradual basis, it would be wonderful for Canadians. That is why the supplementary plan allows people to do that. However, to turn around and ignore the impact that the changes could potentially have on businesses is also to put our heads in the sand.

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to speak to the government's bill. It is what I call the proposed private, for profit, pooled pensions plan. That leaves me speechless.

More seriously, few things are more important to Canadians than their retirement security. For decades they work hard to build a good life for themselves and their families. Every paycheque deduction includes a little something tucked away in their pension plan.

When it comes time to retire, people rightly expect to be able to live in dignity and with some financial security. However, as too many Canadians have found out in recent years, their retirement may not be as secure as they were led to believe and were hoping. RRSPs have taken a beating, and many of those who had been counting on a company pension plan have had a rude shock.

Many found out their plans were underfunded, or they lost everything when their company went bankrupt and took workers' pensions with them. This has been a particular problem in Thunder Bay—Superior North, where a host of creditors, often including the actual owners of the failed subsidiary company, have claims that take precedence over those of pensioners. In a modern industrialized democracy, that just should not be allowed to happen, and my friend representing Thunder Bay—Rainy River has tried to introduce a private member's bill to put pensioners first.

*Government Orders*

One thing that has been rock-steady throughout turbulent times is the Canada pension plan, to which 93% of Canadians subscribe. Companies come and go and investment vehicles like income trusts may arise and then be snatched back the next year by fickle governments, but people can count on the CPP.

It is the most secure retirement vehicle we have. The CPP remains the single most effective solution to ensure retirement security. It is portable, it is sustainable, and it spreads the risk to minimize risk. It is publicly and cheaply administered at a fraction of the administrative costs of private plans. It is far more sustainable than private plans and it pays predictable benefits that do not fall if markets collapse.

The one drawback is that it is not high enough. The maximum benefit currently is only \$986 a month, and the average is only \$528 a month. That, as we know, is not adequate to live on.

People are expecting to make up the shortfall by investing in private investment vehicles such as the pooled pension plan the government is advancing, but private savings vehicles cost many times more than saving in public pension plans.

The administration cost of the CPP is about one-quarter of 1%, while the cost of RRSPs and mutual funds ranges from 2.5% to 4% or even more. Private plans are great for brokers and bankers in Bimmers, but not so great for real, sustainable growth in pensioners' hard-earned investments, and there is little indication of any cap on fees for those pooled plans.

That 2.5% to 4% or more every year eats away at people's retirement. It adds up. When it comes time to retire, Canadians will have many, many thousands less, so why not have it adding up and working for pensioners instead of for private investment companies? Allowing Canadians to opt for contributions up to an extra 2.5% to the CPP would double their benefits, and those are defined benefits, secure benefits. They are a retirement benefit that future seniors can actually count on.

The benefits of the CPP over private schemes do not stop there. Unlike public pensions, private savings are rarely indexed for inflation. That could mean a further lost savings of from 1% to 3% per year, a loss that alone cuts people's initial investment in half over a 30-year period.

As well, the CPP is highly portable for everyone throughout Canada. Pooled registered pension plans are much less so.

By far the biggest fault in this whole pooled pension plan scheme is that it fails to address the needs of Canadians who cannot afford to save for retirement. The vast majority of Canadians do not pay into plans like RRSPs because they simply cannot afford it. According to StatsCan, 60% of Canadians currently do not have any formal pension at all. There are already private retirement investments available out there; if Canadians could afford them, we would not have millions who do not have a pension.

● (1220)

Adding another voluntary and speculative investment plan they cannot afford will not significantly help the situation.

There is a lot we can do in this House to improve retirement security for Canadians. We should be seeking to insure Canadians' pensions, like we do their bank deposits. We should protect pensions when companies go bankrupt by putting pensioners first as creditors, ahead of banks, ahead of shell companies that skim the profits and dump the subsidiaries, as has happened in Thunder Bay—Superior North.

After all the ruined retirements these past few years due to corporate bankruptcies, including many in our forest sector in northwestern Ontario, it is absolutely incredible that the government has not taken action on that front. We should be taking action on all these fronts and allowing Canadians to choose to contribute more to the CPP as well.

There is no reason to continue preventing Canadians from saving more through the one vehicle open to all workers, including the self-employed, a vehicle that is low-cost, universal and portable. It is inflation and risk-proof, with defined benefits, guaranteed by the Government of Canada, that is not yet another private investment scheme that most Canadians will not invest in. That is the CPP.

Instead, all we have is a proposal from the Conservative government to help line the pockets of banks and investment companies some more. It may help some well-off Canadians who can already afford to contribute to private investment vehicles, that may be true, but it will not help the people who need it most, the majority of Canadians. Now we have the added insult and injury of Canadians having to wait from 65 until 67 years old for their old age supplements.

The Conservative government does a great job of looking out for the interests of big banks, big oil companies and other global multinationals with little commitment to any country or workers or their families. This past spring the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences hosted international pension expert, Keith Ambachtsheer, for our big thinking lecture here on Parliament Hill. For the MPs who got up that early to attend, this pension expert made it very clear that the administrative fees on private pension plans usually eat up any pension fund growth. He made it clear that the best pathway to any truly safe and sustainable pension plan for Canadian families was retaining and expanding CPP.

*Government Orders*

I realize that this is an ideologically driven party and government that rarely wants its beliefs to be confused by facts, research, statistics, senseless data or science but, hopefully, on this absolutely crucial question of pensions, it will, it should, listen to experts like Mr. Ambachtsheer. Hopefully it will follow his expert and sage advice and build upon the excellent and sustainable Canada pension plan, a safe, predictable, cost-effective and sustainable model admired worldwide. It just needs expanding to meet modern costs of living.

Canadians know and trust the CPP. They do not want to gamble their pensions, their lives and their retirement futures on a lottery run by expensive bankers and investment brokers.

• (1225)

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to our colleague's comments and to how he railed against the investments in stocks and bonds, and yet I know he is really a proponent of the Canada pension plan. It is interesting to note that the Canada pension plan has huge investments in the stock portfolios of many companies. I just wonder why the member is in opposition to investing in the stock market while continuing to extoll the benefits of Canada pension plan.

**Mr. Bruce Hyer:** Mr. Speaker, I am not opposed to investments at all. Investments should be intelligent and voluntary. It is a form of gambling, let us face it, no matter how good a job we think we are doing. We need to average the risks. We need to average the costs. We need to have skilful people planning and making those investments, and we need to do it at that one-quarter of 1% affordable rate of investment and administrative costs compared to the expensive costs of having brokers do it.

In my province of Ontario, it has become very clear for many years that the security and exchange investment community is badly in need of regulation.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North raising this critical and pressing issue of pension plans not being protected when corporations go bankrupt. Clearly we need legislation that places corporate pension plans as secured creditors in bankruptcy.

The member mentioned that in his riding, Catalyst Paper's current situation is causing real problems for people in Saanich—Gulf Islands, and people in the Ottawa area know well the disaster that befell so many Nortel workers, particularly those with disability pension plans that they had been counting on.

What does the member think it will take to get government action to protect private pension schemes in bankruptcy?

**Mr. Bruce Hyer:** Madam Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River introduced private member's legislation that was excellent and would put pension plans first ahead of other creditors. I hope he will reintroduce that legislation in this House and I hope all members of Parliament will support it. Just as paycheques should come before creditors, so should their pension plans, which are really paycheques held in arrears.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Questions and comments? Resuming debate? Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Call in the members.

*And the bells having rung:*

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The vote is deferred until Monday at the end of government orders.

\* \* \*

**PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of 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, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

**SPEAKER'S RULING**

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** There are 109 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-31.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Motions Nos. 12, 19, 22, 24, 30, 31, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 42 and 47 will not be selected by the Chair because they were defeated in committee.

[*English*]

All remaining motions have been examined and the Chair is satisfied that they meet the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76(1)(5) regarding the selection of motions in amendment at the report stage.

The motions will be grouped for debate as follows.

[*Translation*]

Group No. 1 will include Motions Nos. 1 to 5, 8 to 11, 13 to 18, 20, 21, 23, 25 to 27, 33, 36, 46, 48 to 54, 57 to 70, 73 to 79, 82 to 99 and 104 to 109.

[*English*]

Group No. 2 will include Motions Nos. 6, 7, 55, 56, 71, 72, 80, 81 and 100 to 103.

[*Translation*]

Group No. 3 will include Motions Nos. 28, 29, 32, 38, 41 and 43 to 45.

The voting patterns for the motions within each group are available at the table. The Chair will remind the House of each pattern at the time of voting.

[*English*]

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1 to 5, 8 to 11, 13 to 18, 20, 21, 23, 25 to 27, 33, 36, 46, 48 to 54, 57 to 70, 73 to 79, 82 to 99 and 104 to 109 in Group No. 1 to the House.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP)** moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 7.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 8.

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 9.

Motion No. 11

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 10.

Motion No. 13

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 11.

Motion No. 14

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 12.

Motion No. 15

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 13.

Motion No. 16

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 14.

Motion No. 17

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 15.

Motion No. 18

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 16.

Motion No. 20

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 17.

Motion No. 21

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 18.

*Government Orders*

Motion No. 23

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 19.

Motion No. 25

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 20.

Motion No. 26

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 21.

Motion No. 27

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 22.

Motion No. 33

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 24.

Motion No. 36

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 25.

Motion No. 46

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 28.

Motion No. 48

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 29.

Motion No. 49

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 30.

Motion No. 50

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 31.

Motion No. 51

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 32.

Motion No. 52

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 33.

Motion No. 53

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 34.

Motion No. 54

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 35.

Motion No. 57

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 37.

Motion No. 58

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 38.

Motion No. 59

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 39.

Motion No. 60

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 40.

Motion No. 61

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 41.

Motion No. 62

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 42.

Motion No. 63

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 43.

Motion No. 64

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 44.

Motion No. 65

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 45.

Motion No. 66

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 46.

Motion No. 67

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 47.

Motion No. 68

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 48.

Motion No. 69

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 49.

Motion No. 70

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 50.

Motion No. 73

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 52.

*Government Orders*

Motion No. 74

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 53.

Motion No. 75

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 54.

Motion No. 76

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 55.

Motion No. 77

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 56.

Motion No. 78

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 57.

Motion No. 79

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 58.

Motion No. 82

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 60.

Motion No. 83

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 61.

Motion No. 84

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 62.

Motion No. 85

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 63.

Motion No. 86

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 64.

Motion No. 87

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 65.

Motion No. 88

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 66.

Motion No. 89

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 67.

Motion No. 90

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 68.

Motion No. 91

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 69.

Motion No. 92

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 70.

Motion No. 93

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 71.

Motion No. 94

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 72.

Motion No. 95

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 73.

Motion No. 96

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 74.

Motion No. 97

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 75.

Motion No. 98

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 76.

Motion No. 99

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 77.

Motion No. 104

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 80.

Motion No. 105

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 81.

Motion No. 106

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 82.

Motion No. 107

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 83.

Motion No. 108

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 84.

Motion No. 109

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 85.

● (1245)

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying that it is indeed a sad day that we find ourselves here debating this draconian legislation that witness after witness told us is unconstitutional, violates Canada's international obligations, concentrates too much power in the hands of the minister and will end up costing the provinces more in detention costs.

Bill C-31 has many troubling provisions, including giving the minister the power to hand-pick which countries he thinks are safe; measures to deny some refugees access to the new Refugee Appeal Division based on how they arrived; a five-year mandatory wait for bona fide refugees to become permanent residents and reunite with their families, again based on how they arrived in the country; and treating 16-year-old refugee claimants as adults, including detaining them.

After months of pressure from New Democrats, stakeholder groups and refugees themselves, the minister finally admitted there were major flaws in his legislation, unintended consequences, and made some modest amendments. However, let me be clear. They do not go far enough to win our support for a bill that is so fundamentally flawed and mean-spirited.

In an open editorial to Postmedia News on April 25, a group of prominent immigration, legal and constitutional experts said this:

The Bill protects no one and threatens many. It treats asylum seekers as criminals rather than people who need our protection. It is discriminatory, conflicts with Canadians' sense of fairness, and violates the fundamental rights guaranteed to all people by the Canadian Charter of Rights....

It goes on to say:

In particular, bill C-31 would give the minister of...Immigration...the power to "designate" a group of refugees - including women and youths - who can be jailed for up to 12 months....

On this point, I want to be very clear. The minister wants to create two tiers of refugees. He would concentrate more arbitrary power in his own hands to treat refugees differently depending on how they come to Canada. I would ask the House this: what happened to equality under the law?

Witness after witness told us at committee stage that Bill C-31 would have the effect of punishing legitimate refugees and would do nothing to address the problems of human smuggling.

For example, Rivka Auginfeld told the committee on Wednesday May 2:

I'd like to [just] add that this bill...[says that it wants] to control smugglers, and [in order] to control smugglers it is punishing refugees. It's punishing people because of the way they arrived. ...nothing to do with the content of their claim. The content of the claim becomes secondary to the method of arrival.

In the meantime, I would submit that the previous legislation, which is now in place, gives you all the tools you need to go after smugglers and big smugglers....

She goes on to say:

The victims may come, but the victims [who arrive] need [our] help. And we don't know—based on how a person [arrives in this country]...—what the content of their claim is.

It is sad that we find ourselves again having this debate because we just passed refugee reform last year. The Conservatives are going back on compromise they praised only months ago.



*Government Orders*

In 2010, the Minister of Immigration singled out my colleague, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, for her “remarkable diligence” working the government to amend Bill C-11 to limit the number of fraudulent applications and reduce the backlog in Canada's immigration system.

At the time, we believed we would finally get a refugee reform package that was fast, fair and consistent with Canadian values. Everyone was reasonably happy with that outcome. Even the minister found it to be a very reasonable “compromise”. He went on to say that it “is nothing short of a miracle”.

However, here we are again debating the piece of legislation that goes back on almost all of the compromises that were made in the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, and now we have a punish refugee reform act before us even before those important reforms have been allowed to take place.

• (1250)

In addition to the many constitutional and moral problems we have with the bill, it is also fiscally irresponsible, and the Conservatives should understand this argument, and has the potential to saddle the provinces with huge increases in detention costs.

Chantal Tie, a representative from the Canadian Council for Refugees, said to the committee on May 3:

What does fiscal responsibility have to do with Bill C-31? We believe fiscal responsibility is about spending taxpayers' dollars wisely. The CCR is committed to an affordable refugee protection system.

Then she goes on to say:

Our current system is doing an individualized risk assessment, which works well to protect our society and ensure the integrity of the immigration system. The figure we used was 6% [from CBSA], which means that 94% of refugee claimants on average do not need to be detained. If this bill passes, we will be detaining 100% of designated arrivals for a year. The math is simple. Ninety-four percent of the people we will be detaining will not need to be detained, if past experiences serve us well.

Members can do the math.

Mary Crock, a professor from Australia who has studied that country's disastrous attempt to punish refugees, told our committee on May 2:

...these measures do not deter. They cost a fortune. Financially they cost a fortune and socially they cost a fortune....

It is important to note that the Australian legislation, which is similar to ours, has not proven to have had a deterrent effect on human smuggling.

Simply put, the bill is not in the interest of sound fiscal management and prudent use of taxpayer money at this time when budgets are stretched thin.

As I mentioned before, another key area of concern for us is that the minister is giving himself the power to hand-pick which countries he thinks are safe, without advice from independent experts. Members will remember that the addition of a panel of experts to determine a so-called safe country was a key compromise to the opposition under the yet-to-be-enacted Balanced Refugee Reform Act.

It is our view that any country is capable of producing a legitimate refugee. The most glaring examples come from the Roma

in Hungary, women and children in abusive homes in places like Mexico and the LGBTQ community in many countries of the Caribbean, Africa and beyond. There are numerous cases of those who are persecuted for religious reasons in countries that might otherwise be deemed safe by our minister.

There is another problem with the designation of so-called safe countries that ties in with the meanspirited announcements last week that refugee claimants are about to have their health coverage slashed by the Conservatives.

Yesterday in a piece in the *Embassy*, reporter Kristen Shane pointed out that a potentially legitimate refugee from a so-called safe country delivering a baby or undergoing emergency surgery for a heart attack at a Canadian hospital would have to pay for it out of pocket because of changes to the government's refugee health insurance act, said to take effect in July. Shame. Knowing that potentially legitimate refugees from so-called safe countries could actually be denied basic emergency medical coverage for the delivery of a baby and even for a heart attack is unconscionable.

We believe the government needs to go back to the drawing board on Bill C-31, and therefore we will be opposing it. Because none of the NDP's substantive amendments were adopted by the government members at committee, and because MPs from all parties just passed a balanced refugee reform package last Parliament, I have moved to delete all clauses from this legislation.

If my hon. colleagues from the Conservative Party were really concerned about human smuggling, they would be less focused on photo ops and more focused on enforcing our already strict laws. They would give the RCMP the resources it needs to get the job done, instead of playing politics with the world's most vulnerable. I hope they will listen to reason, scrap this flawed legislation and return to the framework we all agreed to in the Balanced Refugee Reform Act.

• (1255)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I understand and respect the fact that we went through a process on the bill that included a significant review and included dozens of witnesses. It included a very detailed review of each and every clause. The member who just spoke was at all those meetings when it came to clause-by-clause and moved all her amendments, of which none here today are similar to any of the amendments she moved there. She speaks to getting into a position of doing what is right for refugees and not playing politics.

I would ask the hon. member why, for whatever reason, a member would come into this House, make a speech like that and suggest she is not playing politics, when all she is doing is holding up the process and attempting to remove every single item, every single clause from a bill.

That is not about working together. That is about splitting this House apart, and it is absolutely unacceptable. Members can rest assured that this government will be voting against every single one of those amendments.

*Government Orders*

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, we were pleased at the committee stage when the government moved an amendment to correct what the minister saw was an unintended consequence. However, we took significant amendments to the committee stage that we thought were absolutely necessary and that the government flat out ignored, as my colleague just pointed out.

We took those amendments there in good conscience to try to work on this legislation, so that it would be fair to asylum seekers and refugees arriving in this country. The government side absolutely refused to consider any of those recommendations, and the tiny moves that were made by the government side did not address our major concerns. That is why we are moving clause-by-clause amendments that would remove the bill.

We have a bill in place. It is called the Balanced Refugee Protection Act. We do not need a bill that is called “the punishing refugees act” at this stage.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the actual bill is entitled the protecting Canada's immigration system act and not how the member referred to it. I would—

• (1300)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. I am not sure that is a point of order, but rather a point of debate.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, no doubt I will get the opportunity to expand on how the Liberal Party feels about Bill C-31, but for now I will put it in the form of a question and statement and ask the member to provide comment.

One of the greatest concerns we have is that Bill C-31 would set into place the establishment of a two-tier refugee system. Canadians need to be aware of that.

I believe that at the end of the day this will tarnish Canada's international leadership on the refugee file. Many countries around the world look to Canada for the way we treat refugees. The bill is unconstitutional in many ways. It goes against the UN convention in other ways. The establishment of a two-tier refugee system is just wrong.

I wonder if the member would further expand upon that, specifically on those refugees who would be penalized by being deemed irregular. They would be unable to sponsor their family members because they would have been determined irregular by this particular minister.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague was at the committee stage when we went over many of these issues. He has a good understanding of the legislation before us.

Creating a two-tiered system for refugees, I would argue, goes against the way we have built our country. We have built our country on immigrants and refugees coming from different parts of the world, and we have had a nation-building scheme. Now, with this legislation, the government is going to decide, not based on the merits of a person's claim, but by how they arrive in our country or by the numbers they arrive in, and it is going to designate them irregular. Not only then does it have the potential to keep them in detention, jail, for a year, but after that, for five years, they will not

be given any kind of a status that would allow them to have their family members join them. We know that once one applies, it can take anything up to six or seven years after that, so families will be separated. This is from a government that says its base is about building strong families. For whom?

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak yet again at report stage of Bill C-31.

I want to make it clear that the minister, I and this government from day one have stated that we would consider any reasonable amendments put forward that would be consistent with the goals and the principles of the bill.

I would remind the House that Bill C-31 aims to make Canada's refugee system fairer and faster. It also aims to provide protection to genuine refugees who need to be qualified for assistance much more quickly, while we remove those asylum seekers who are bogus, of criminal background or who come here from a human smuggling perspective. We are after those human smugglers, and the bill makes it very clear.

To no surprise, the minister, I and my colleagues on committee, who did an amazing job, and this government had a chance to keep our word. After lengthy and in-depth study at committee and after hearing from literally dozens of witnesses, the government did agree to several amendments that would strengthen the bill.

There are two further amendments that we have presented at report stage. As the minister will also explain, as will those who will follow me, both amendments are technical in nature. The first amendment affects clause 26 and simply corrects a French word in one of the amendments passed at committee to ensure it is consistent with the English word used and the French wording used throughout the rest of the legislation.

Clause 26 of Bill C-31 includes the detention of anyone who arrives on Canada's shores as part of a human smuggling event, and for good reason. It is the responsibility of any government to protect the safety and security of its citizens. Smuggled migrants often arrive in Canada with no documentation. At first, it is literally impossible to tell who is who.

Just a couple of days ago, and these are the second charges that have been laid with respect to the irregular arrival of the *Ocean Lady* and the *Sun Sea*, the RCMP laid charges against two of the alleged organizers of the MV *Sun Sea* human smuggling operation who arrived on the boat along with other smuggling migrants. I want to congratulate the RCMP for its hard work on these cases and on the previous charges it laid in relation to the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady*.

These vessels included on them criminal human smugglers, the organizers of these dangerous and too often deadly voyages, terrorists and other criminals among others. It is important that all of the individuals who arrived as a party to a human smuggling event are detained until their identities are established and it is determined whether they pose a risk to the safety and security of Canadians.

*Government Orders*

I am a little shocked that the NDP and the Liberals would vote against these provisions and this amendment. My constituents in the riding of St. Catharines, almost without exception, support the intent and the movement of the bill in terms of what it will do for refugees, what it will do to those who would not be qualified refugees and the whole component of human smuggling. I am certain that if went into the ridings of my colleagues on the other side of the House, we would determine that most of their constituents support the legislation.

It behooves me to say that it would seem to me that when it comes to Bill C-31, the position taken by both the NDP and the Liberal Party is about ideology rather than the safety and security of Canadians.

• (1305)

At committee we put forward amendments that would add reviews when we came to the whole aspect of detention. Those individuals who arrived on these irregular arrivals, as we saw with the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady*, would in fact be detained for the purposes of identification, for the purposes of determining whether they are in fact true refugees and for the purposes of determining whether they were criminals in their own country or were the individuals who organized the event of the smuggling.

We have said, and we have made changes within the content of the bill through amendment at committee, that after 14 days, these individuals will have an opportunity for a review of their file. If their file has not been completed within a period of six months after the first initial review, they will have an opportunity for a further review.

We have to keep in mind that under Bill C-31, decisions on refugee claims will take place within a few short months, compared to the current system where the origin application is heard, on average, within a one to two year period of time.

The fact is this legislation does exactly what it is supposed to do. It moves the process up much quicker so a determination is made at a much sooner stage in the process, as soon as 45 days in most circumstances. If that is not the case, within the context of the irregular arrival, the individuals will still have an opportunity to have their hearing after six months. We have solved what many on the other side of the House say we should do.

I want to thank the NDP immigration critic who, as she stated at committee and in the House, which I appreciated, welcomed the move by the government to add detention reviews. She in fact praised the government for its willingness to listen to the witnesses and feedback we received and the fact that we were open to accepting amendments that actually did improve the legislation.

For the record, she was not the only one. Rob Shropshire, interim executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees, stated that the amendment to clause 26 and other clauses to add detention reviews was certainly “a good thing.”

It is important to give credit where credit is due. The one thing I have experienced at the citizenship and immigration committee since I have been there is that there is, within the walls of Parliament Hill, the ability to work with each, not necessarily agree but certainly do our best to work together.

Credit where credit is due, the NDP did support every amendment that the government put forward to improve the detention provisions related human smuggling in this bill. I want to thank each of the members of the committee for doing that. Unfortunately, despite supporting the amendments at committee, the NDP will vote against this amendment to improve this new provision and it will still vote against the improved bill.

I find that rather telling about the NDP's position on this bill. The NDP members will vote against this technical amendment to ensure that the wording is consistent through the bill even though they voted for the original amendment at committee.

I suppose after having complimented the NDP members of the committee who supported the amendment, it is rather unfortunate and a reminder that the NDP says one thing to Canadians in front of the news cameras and does another thing in Ottawa. If they want to make Parliament work, then they should be consistent in terms of where they support what has been proposed by the government and acknowledge that throughout the process versus what I believe to be a good start and then a very quick completion.

The second amendment the government has put forward at report stage is also technical. It is needed as a result of an amendment that was adopted at committee stage. The committee adopted an amendment that added a subsection to clause 83, and that amendment was simply not numbered. The amendment adds 83(1). Clause 83(1) pertains to the one-year ban on the pre-removal risk assessment for failed asylum claimants.

These are two technical amendments that the government will support to move the bill forward.

• (1310)

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there were a few amendments that we did support at the committee stage. We also made it very clear at committee that we could not support the clause. However, we supported those amendments because they would mitigate the harm that would be there for the refugees. They absolutely did not go far enough when it came to the review for those people in detention. Fourteen days is too long for people to wait.

However, I want to ask a question along a different tack.

The current act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, actually allows the government to detain new arrivals until it has confirmed their identity and done a criminal check and a security check. That actually exists right now. I think we need to very clear about that.

However, the new bill, Bill C-31, says that there will be mandatory imprisonment for up to a year for irregular arrivals and that there will be no automatic release once they have their identification, security checks and criminal record checks have cleared. That is a big concern for us.

The question for my colleague is on how they will —

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker, because it gives me the opportunity to identify that 80% to 85% of what was in Bill C-11 has been carried forward to Bill C-31.

*Government Orders*

One of the reasons we introduced this legislation is that the process, even under Bill C-11, would take an extremely long period of time to work through. The minister, the government and the department identified that an opportunity to move forward and expedite the process through which a refugee claimant could make a claim to become a refugee here in Canada would actually speed up that process. , Bill C-31 would give an individual or a family who is applying to become a refugee here in Canada a much quicker process.

Therefore, even if those individuals are in detention during that period of time, they would now have two opportunities for a review of their file. We believe that before that second review takes place in six months, we will have made the identification and will have determined whether the individual is a claimant who has been denied or a claimant who is a true refugee here in the country.

• (1315)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a very specific question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration with regard to this whole idea of the two-tiered refugee system.

There is a retroactive portion in the bill that, if passed, means that the individuals who arrived on the *Sun Sea* or the *Ocean Lady* could be subjected to Bill C-31, which means that, if and when they acquire refugee status, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism gets to decide whether they will be able to sponsor a family member shortly after being recognized as legitimate refugees.

Is the parliamentary secretary prepared to give a guarantee to the House that the individuals who arrived on the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady* will not be subjected to this legislation?

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, I am certainly not going to give the member that kind of guarantee. What I will do, though, is identify the fact that he talked about a two-tiered system.

We, on this side of the House, do not believe that UN-sanctioned refugees who have been living in squalor and who have been waiting for years, in some cases over a decade, to find out where they will start their new lives and who have already been declared refugees, should, in any way, shape or form, be superseded by irregular arrivals who are claiming refugee status in Canada.

What Bill C-31 would do, and what Bill C-11 did, is it would eliminate the potential of a two-tiered system.

We need to ensure that all those individuals who have already received refugee status get their opportunity for a new life in Canada. Those are the individuals who deserve to get here quickly. Those are the individuals we have committed to.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary reinforces why it is we have a two-tier system. We need to recognize that the people on the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady* will be deemed as irregular arrivals once this legislation passes. If we had applied that same principle to what the government wants today, that would have been applied to a ship that came from India, Europe or Vietnam. The government would have classified these individuals as irregulars. The moment they are branded as irregular arrivals, they will be treated differently from other refugees,

which goes against the 1951 United Nations convention. That is something that was brought to the government's attention, even in committee.

I want to pick up on the point that Bill C-31 would tarnish Canada's leadership role in the whole area of refugees. For many years, Canada has been a leader when it comes to the development of refugee policies. Countries throughout the world have looked to Canada as a model and to see how they might be able to emulate it.

What became quite apparent at the committee level after listening to presenter after presenter was that this would tarnish our reputation. One of the primary reasons for that was the establishment of the two-tier refugee, better known as the irregular arrival versus the other form of arrival, and the consequences of that. For example, as with the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady*, people left their country because they were scared of being tortured or possibly killed, or whatever the reason might have been. They would be victimized once again by being put into a detention centre and then, because they would be labelled as irregulars, even if they were classified shortly thereafter as being bona fide refugees, they would not be able to sponsor their children or their spouse for at least five years, unlike other refugees. To me and everyone else except the Conservative members of the committee that is a two-tier system.

The Conservatives talked a lot about the importance of mandatory detention. I will concede that they did change their minds once we were at the committee stage, and I applaud them on doing that, but we need to look at the reality of it. The current system related to detentions works. Canada Border Services presented at the committee. We already have the ability to do what is proposed in this bill in terms of being able to keep people in detention centres. That aspect of the system is not broken. The government has made that up in order to bring in what it had originally called "the anti-smuggling bill". That is the one for which the Prime Minister and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism stepped on the back of a ship to give the impression that we were being invaded by refugees. That aspect of the legislation does not need to be fixed. It works and yet the government is prepared to tarnish our reputation in order to have a photo op and create a false impression with Canadians.

As I said, the Conservatives did back down at the committee stage and changed their mind. Now they are saying that there will be a 14 day review, which is great. We support that idea. However, after that it is a long six months. We suggested that, at the very least, there should be some sort of review every 28 days. They call it judicial overview.

• (1320)

We should not have to keep people in detention if there is no need to keep them in detention. However, for some reason the Conservatives believe they should, at a huge cost. I am not just talking about the dollar figure. I am also talking about the social cost of it.

*Government Orders*

The government likes to think it is about families and yet it wants to lock up parents of children who will be put into foster care facilities. Better yet, the government is saying that people will have a choice, the choice being that they can take their eight-year-old son with them to jail so they can still be together. What kind of a dilemma is that? As a parent, my choice is that I can either take my eight-year-old child with me into a jail or a detention centre or I can have my child separated from me and living in a foster care facility. One does not need to be a psychiatrist to understand that will cause all sorts of social issues going forward after the matter has been resolved.

There is the issue of age. We moved amendment after amendment to try to deal with the recognition that there is a difference between 16 and 18 years of age.

At the end of the day, we believe the minister is now saying that he is the one to decide. Not only can he tell who is a regular or irregular arrival, he wants to be able to say what is a safe country and what is not. One had better not be on that safe country list because it will be a whole lot more difficult. People had better come with a lot of paperwork and have it filed, and know who they will be recruiting to represent them because they will not have very much time to get their case together in order to adequately represent themselves.

How many advocates, groups and individuals, whether they were lawyers or lay people who came before the committee, said that was not enough time? The government is not allowing individuals the opportunity to make and state their cases.

We in the Liberal Party want a process that will not only be fast but we want the other “F” word also: fair. That seems to have escaped the government. It does not seem to recognize the importance of fairness in the system. That has been lost on the minister.

We talked at great lengths in regard to the safe country list. We do not believe for a moment that the minister should have the responsibility of designation. We believe there are people who are much better equipped to determine which country should be deemed a safe country. That is why, in previous legislation, when there was a minority Conservative government, there was a consensus. Even the current Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism acknowledged back then that it was good legislation and it made sense.

What did that legislation say? It said that there would be an advisory panel of professionals, of people who had an understanding of human rights and so forth. Those individuals would be the ones to identify those countries around the world that could be deemed as being safe.

We were hopeful that was something on which the government would have been open to amendments. When the government said that it was open to amendments, we went into the committee stage in anticipation that would, in fact, be the case. The government made some amendments that came out of its own party but there was nothing in terms of recognizing the advisory committee, even though all political parties agreed to that previously and it would have improved the legislation.

The Liberal Party put forward numerous amendments. The Green Party picked up on a number of those amendments. We had hoped to

give the government a second chance by getting it to support those amendments.

We do not support the bill as a whole because we believe the government has really dropped the ball on this reform package. We recognize the importance of speeding up the process but we also believe that there needs to be fairness, judicial overview and ministerial accountability and that is missing in this bill.

● (1325)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the hon. member's speech more than once now. It is one that reoccurs on a continuous basis, whether we are here in the House of Commons on this issue, or whether we are at committee. There is something the member fails to acknowledge, and I would like him to clarify.

One of the last witnesses we had at committee was a delegate from the United Nations. In his presentation, he spoke at great length on the content of the bill and his perspective on it. Whether the member agrees with the 15 day period, or whether he thinks there should be more time, is for debate. However, when it comes to the convention on refugees, we meet the minimum threshold in terms of the chance for a hearing. I would like the member to acknowledge this.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. I try to be consistent in the House, in committee and in my constituency. Consistency is important.

It is important to have an open mind so that when someone comes up with a good idea one is prepared to genuinely look at it, assess it and take action if it would improve the bill.

The presentation that my colleague referred to did make reference to the 15 days. However, there was a litany of other things that the individual presented. Members can access a full presentation on the issue. The United Nations has serious concerns with this legislation. I suspect, as a whole, it would have been much happier had there been a number of amendments recognizing some of the flaws in the legislation.

● (1330)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sadia Grogue (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said that many witnesses appeared before the committee and spoke about the discriminatory effects of this bill, which creates two classes of refugees. The measures taken in this bill are not at all dissuasive; instead, they put real refugees in a difficult position.

There is also the issue of the designation of safe countries. We also heard from witnesses who spoke about the situation of the Roma community.

Could the hon. member comment on this?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the two-tier refugee system, maybe the best thing to do is provide a tangible example.

*Government Orders*

A family or group of four people fly into the Trudeau airport in Montreal. The minister would have the authority to say that they are irregular arrivals, which means they would go through a completely different stream and they would be treated completely differently than a group of four people at the Toronto international airport who are not deemed irregular arrivals.

Under that situation, the potential refugees in Montreal would be subjected to such things as detention or not being able to sponsor a child they might have left behind because they wanted to get out of the country quickly because of a threat of death or torture, for five years. It is going to keep the family apart. However, that group of four individuals who landed in Toronto would be able to sponsor because they were deemed as regular arrivals.

That is why it is very important for us to understand that there is going to be a distinction between those refugees who are deemed irregular arrivals and those who are not. That is where the concern comes in with regard to the 1951 UN convention.

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-31, Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act.

The government has put forward two amendments at report stage in order to ensure the bill completely reflects the amendments that were adopted at committee. I am pleased to speak to these amendments today.

Canada has the fairest and most generous immigration system in the world. We welcome more resettled refugees per capita than almost any other country. That number is rising. We are increasing by 20%, or an additional 2,500, the number of refugees we resettle each year.

The fact is that our system is open to abuse. Bogus refugees and human smugglers have been using Canada as a doormat for far too long. Canadians have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and who take unfair advantage of our country. The government is committed to strengthening the integrity of Canada's immigration system. Bill C-31, the amendments that were adopted at committee, and the amendments we are debating now at report stage all serve the same purpose. Through them, the government would take action to crack down on this abuse and make Canada's asylum system fairer and faster.

We would put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and bogus refugees abusing our generous immigration system, using endless avenues of appeal to remain in Canada and receive lucrative taxpayer-funded health and social benefits. At the same time, we would provide protection more quickly to those who are truly in need.

As we know, bogus refugee claimants are bogging down the system, resulting in genuine refugee claimants, who are fleeing torture, death and persecution, waiting on average almost two years to receive a decision on their cases. Our government believes this is unfair.

Under Bill C-31 genuine refugees would receive Canada's protection in a few short months instead of a few years. This is laudable and surely should be supported by every member of the House. Canadians have given the government a strong mandate to

protect Canada's immigration system and we are active on that mandate.

The two amendments introduced by the minister at report stage are technical amendments. They both seek to ensure the amended bill fully and accurately reflects the amendments that were adopted by the committee after an in-depth study and testimony by dozens of witnesses. One amendment seeks to ensure the French and English wording used throughout the bill are consistent. The second amendment would ensure that the entire bill reflects a new subsection that was created through an amendment that was passed at committee.

These amendments directly respond to the testimony and suggestions of witnesses such as clarifying provisions around revocation of refugee status, adding detention reviews at 14 days and again at 6 months for those who arrive as part of a human smuggling event, and ensuring that asylum seekers who come from countries that have been designated as safe no longer have endless avenues of appeal which allow them to remain in Canada for years and receive lucrative taxpayer-funder social assistance and health care benefits.

The minister has rightfully been praised for his willingness to accept amendments to the bill. He has said all along that he would be willing to seriously consider any reasonable amendment to make it fair and fast and provide Canada's protection to genuine refugees in need while removing bogus refugees more quickly and cracking down on the despicable crime of human smuggling.

This often has repercussions because we never know if it is a human smuggling event mixed up with a human trafficking event, and sometimes it gets very precarious. The government's amendments that were adopted at committee and the amendments we are debating now are proof that the government is committed to implementing a bill to improve our refugee system so that it is as strong and as effective as possible. We owe that to all Canadians.

It is evident that our government is willing to listen and to work to create and amend bills that are in the best interests of Canadians. Our constituents expect no less.

Let me give you a sample of what is being said about our government and the minister's openness to amending and further improving this bill. A recent *Ottawa Citizen* editorial stated:

[The minister] deserves praise for showing a few leadership qualities that are in short supply these days: willingness to talk, the courage to listen, and the flexibility to change his mind.

This is in keeping with what Canadians have seen of [the minister] in the past. Although he's unabashedly partisan, he is able to work with MPs from all parties. He seemed deservedly proud of the fact that he managed to get another refugee bill passed in 2010, with opposition support, when his government held a minority. The fact that he's still working with other parties when his government has a majority speaks well of him.

[The minister] seems determined that his time in public office should result in a legacy of better policy, not just a long string of election victories and an eventual corporate or patronage sinecure.

I cannot agree more.

• (1335)

Even *The Toronto Star* has praised the minister and in an editorial stated that his willingness to amend the bill suggests that he “is trying to make the refugee system faster and more fair”. In an editorial *The Embassy* stated, “good for [the minister] for agreeing to changes to the refugee bill, C-31”.

It is not just the media that is praising the government and the minister. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association stated in a news release that it “welcomes the Minister of Immigration's announcement that the government is proposing amendments to Bill C-31...”.

It goes even further than that. The NDP immigration critic and MP for Newton—North Delta stated on several occasions that she welcomed any move by the minister and the government to make improvements to the legislation. She spoke very favourably at committee of the government's willingness to take into account the views of various witnesses and stakeholders and to amend the bill, especially the detention provisions around human smuggling events.

Unfortunately the NDP has been playing partisan games with the amendments both at committee and at report stage. The opposition NDP and the Liberals will surely vote against these reasonable technical amendments. By opposing technical amendments that ensure the French and English wording is consistent, and that ensure the original version of the bill reflects the addition of a new subsection that was added at committee stage, they show that while the NDP and the Liberals say in front of the news cameras that they want to make Parliament work, their actions show quite the opposite is true. By voting against these amendments the NDP and the Liberals are proving yet again that they cannot be anything other than blindly partisan and that they are not willing to work with the government in good faith to pass legislation that is in the best interests of Canada.

I urge the NDP and the Liberals to change their position, stop opposing and trying to delay this important piece of legislation. I urge them to support these report stage amendments and the entire Bill C-31, to work with our government to help crack down on bogus refugee claimants and criminal human smugglers abusing the generosity of Canadian taxpayers and treating our country like a doormat.

I urge the opposition to support these amendments and the bill that would have the positive impact of providing protection more quickly to genuine refugees fleeing persecution, torture and death.

• (1340)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the last speaker, I wondered whether we were even sitting on the same committee. All of the witnesses said that this bill—its very essence—should be rejected. I will name only a few of them, not the least of which include: the Barreau du Québec, the Canadian Bar Association and UNICEF. This bill does not respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada's civil liberties legislation or the international conventions.

A few amendments are not enough to change the very essence of this legislation, because, through an arbitrary ministerial decision,

### *Government Orders*

this bill gives the government the right to detain anyone it deems to be a “designated foreign national”.

Will the government amend this bill to remove the concept of “designated foreign national” or not?

[English]

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, their amendments would remove every clause in the bill.

This country has followed and applied the UN charter. We are the most generous country in the world. We bring in more refugees than almost every other country on the planet. The people who come here would tell us that themselves, whether they are immigrants, refugees or others.

Canada has absolutely nothing to apologize for to anybody in the world or any interest or partisan group.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member has sat through some of the immigration committee meetings, maybe all of them. I am not too sure exactly how many he was there for.

The issue of detention came up time and time again. At one time the Conservatives were proposing that it be mandatory for an entire year. What was made very clear was the fact that the current system of detention works. I am talking strictly the detention aspect of the bill. We had the ability to keep people in detention well over a year, indefinitely. Anyone who seemed to be a potential threat to our nation, whether it was security or health or whatever it might have been, was already there.

If the detention system was working well, why would the government want to change it?

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, this new process expedites everything. This would allow people who attend to hear the results of their hearings very quickly and get out. The other issue is that once individuals are identified, they are released.

Let me explain why some of the people are detained in the first place. I am sure that Canadians would not allow unknown persons into their homes to interact with their families and children, to avail themselves of their homes, their generosity and everything else.

That is the problem with some of these smuggling events. We do not know if they are real refugees, which some of them may be. We do not know if they are bogus refugees trying to take advantage of our generous system. We do not know if they are queue jumpers trying to get into Canada.

As the parliamentary secretary said earlier, there are a lot of UN convention refugees who are ready to resettle in this country. It is their right to do so, and we have a responsibility to them to make sure they arrive in this country fairly.

Many of these events are often tied up with human trafficking events. Until we can determine exactly who is involved in these events, we owe it to Canadians to defend their security in our country.

*Government Orders***ROYAL ASSENT**

● (1345)

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

The Secretary to the Governor General and Herald Chancellor  
May 17, 2012

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bill listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 17th day of May, 2012, at 9:30 a.m.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Wallace

The schedule indicates that the bills assented to on Thursday, May 17, 2012, were Bill S-4, An Act to amend the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to the Canada Transportation Act—Chapter 7, and Bill S-1003, An Act to authorize Industrial Alliance Pacific Insurance and Financial Services Inc. to apply to be continued as a body corporate under the laws of Quebec.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[Translation]

**PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT**

The House resumed consideration of 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, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for two weeks in a row, we heard testimony from experts, front-line workers and refugees who came to express their concerns about Bill C-31 while it was being studied by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I want to remind the House that a policy without justice is an inadequate policy. Bill C-31 completely jeopardizes refugee rights, and creates two classes of refugees.

The NDP does not support Bill C-31. The Conservatives should withdraw it so that the new Balanced Refugee Reform Act can work. Never before have the rights of refugees been as threatened as they are under the Conservatives. Never has our democracy been as discredited as it has been under the Conservative government, which is incapable of respecting the compromises consensually agreed upon with the other parties.

The government is unable to remember that the ratification of international refugee or human rights conventions requires us to make our legislation and policies consistent with the provisions of the international conventions we have signed. The experts who spoke to us reminded us that Canada is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees. They feel that Bill C-31 protecting Canada's immigration system act respects neither the letter nor the spirit of the convention.

Let us first recall that Bill C-31 is an omnibus bill to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, unfortunately by incorporating into Bill C-4 the most unreasonable provisions of former Bill C-11, which received royal assent in June 2010. This bill raises serious concerns in addition to those already raised by Bill C-4, the unconstitutional nature of which we have raised and highlighted in our previous interventions. All the witnesses we heard during the committee's study of the bill agreed unanimously.

I would like to draw the attention of the House to some of the concerns with this bill, both in terms of the Canadian charter and the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees. In response to Bill C-31, the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers has said that, like the sorry Bill C-10, Bill C-31 is extremely complicated.

The most draconian measures in Bill C-4 have again been made part of Bill C-31. Take automatic and mandatory detention, for example. Bill C-4 proposed mandatory detention for one year for people fleeing persecution in their country of origin and entering Canada without identity documents in their possession.

Clearly, the safety of Canadians is a priority for the NDP. That is why the current immigration legislation provides for detaining foreign nationals when their identity is not known, when they might run away, and especially when public safety is at risk. So we can see how the provisions on detention found in Bill C-4, which are being reintroduced in Bill C-31 are a direct violation of our Constitution.

Furthermore, the jurisprudence constante of the Supreme Court is categorical in this regard. The Barreau du Québec, the Canadian Bar Association, the Young Bar Association of Montreal and other legal experts who gave testimony were categorical about the unconstitutional nature of detention under Bill C-31, and specifically the detention of children.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits the detention of children and defines a child as a human being under 18 years of age. We are asking that the age of the child be consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Finally, the experts whom we have heard from in committee have hammered away at the point that the detention of children is prohibited because it is detrimental to them psychologically, mentally and physiologically, and to society as a whole. For example, Australia had introduced mandatory detention for asylum seekers, but it had to backtrack, because, not only did detention cause costs to skyrocket, but it also destroyed the fabric of society and communities.

Why are the Conservatives attempting to put themselves above the rule of law, which is a key principle of our democracy, even though they know what our highest court said about detention in the Charkaoui case? Why are they asking the House to pass a bill that we know will be subject to court challenges, as a number of experts reminded us?



*Government Orders*

•(1350)

Why are they attempting to mislead the House by proposing that it pass laws that they know violate not only our Constitution, but also the Canadian charter and human rights conventions that our country has signed? *Pacta sunt servanda* is a principle of international law. Signed conventions have to be respected.

There are also deadlines that violate a principle of natural justice. Lawyers specializing in refugee rights have said that they are deeply troubled by the short time frames that Bill C-31 gives refugee claimants to seek Canada's protection. They find that Bill C-31 drastically changes Canada's refugee protection system and makes it unfair.

Bill C-31 imposes unrealistic time frames and unattainable deadlines on refugee claimants and uses the claimants' inability to meet those deadlines to exclude them from protection.

In fact, under the terms of Bill C-31, refugee claimants have only 15 days to overcome the trauma of persecution, find a lawyer to help them, gather the documentary evidence to support their allegations, and obtain proof of identity from their country.

If their application is dismissed, refugee claimants would have 15 days within which to file an appeal under Bill C-31. As anyone can see, the deadlines imposed on refugee claimants do not allow them to make a full response and defence.

Under our justice system, the greater the risk to life, the longer the time frame accorded to the person being tried to prepare his defence. Bill C-31 does not respect this principle of fundamental justice. A number of witnesses pointed this out to us.

I am also deeply concerned not only about the new term—designated country of origin—that Bill C-31 introduces into our legislation but also about the undemocratic nature of the process for designating the countries in question. Under Bill C-31, the minister alone has the power to designate safe countries of origin, without first defining the designation criteria for these countries that refugees may come from.

According to the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, the designated safe country list and the unilateral power granted to the minister dangerously politicize Canada's refugee system.

Refugee claimants who are on a designated safe country list have even less time to submit their written arguments and will not be allowed an appeal.

Bill C-31 also relieves the minister of the obligation of justifying why a country is safe or considering the differential risks that certain minorities face in a country that is safe for other people.

If Bill C-31 is passed, refugees will become more vulnerable because their fate will depend on the political whims of the minister and the government. Failed claimants from designated countries of origin can be deported from Canada almost immediately, even if they have requested a judicial review of the decision. In other words, a person can be deported before his case is heard.

The Geneva convention stipulates that the personal fears of victims of persecution are to be taken into consideration. Nowhere

does it say that international protection is given to victims of persecution because of the country in which the persecution occurred, or whether or not the victim used clandestine means to reach a state that is a party to the convention.

It is not only in undemocratic countries that religious minorities are persecuted. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is not restricted to undemocratic countries. Persecution based on race can occur in any country in the world. All member states of the European Convention on Human Rights are democratic countries. But the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights is replete with decisions condemning democratic states for their abuse of individuals.

The government has frequently invoked the UNHCR's favourable opinion of the safe countries of origin list.

I would like to conclude by mentioning my final concern about the changes being made by Bill C-31 with respect to applications on humanitarian grounds. These applications are a tool that allow individuals to remain in Canada, even if they are not eligible for other reasons. Unfortunately, under Bill C-31, applicants awaiting a decision from the Refugee Appeal Division cannot simultaneously submit an application on humanitarian grounds.

I would like to point out that our country has always been in the forefront where basic human rights are concerned.

•(1355)

The refugee problem is a human rights problem and, since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all people are acknowledged to have these rights, whatever their race, religion, political beliefs or lifestyle.

Asylum seekers are above all human beings. They are to be treated with respect, humanity and dignity. More than anything else, they fall into the category of vulnerable people who need our compassion and our protection. What is involved here is universal human justice.

This bill and these universal values are poles apart. That is why Bill C-31 should be rejected.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question with regard to the designated countries of origin.

The NDP members are either choosing to misrepresent the clause and the interpretation of it or they are purposely misleading individuals who are trying to get a better understanding of Bill C-31.

Many countries use the principle. Ireland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland are all countries that use designated countries of origin. Most important, there are quantitative and qualitative reviews that will automatically kick in when a country reaches the threshold of being designated a country. It does not happen automatically. The review includes ministry officials and other ministries in terms of input.

Why does the member continue to misrepresent exactly what is in this bill in terms of the designated country of origin?

*Statements by Members*

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé:** Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to say that we unanimously agreed on a refugee bill that contained a measure whereby a panel of experts was to sit to address this matter of establishing a safe country list.

I would like to remind this House that now, under Bill C-31, only the minister has this discretionary power to establish a safe country list. That is neither democratic nor normal.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

**CYBERBULLYING**

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a teacher I know full well the impact that cyberbullying has on our children. In my riding, several children have suffered so badly that they have tragically taken their lives as a result of bullying.

I wish to congratulate Nova Scotia Progressive Conservative leader Jamie Baillie on his innovative legislation that combats cyberbullying. His legislation will create a legal definition for cyberbullying. It forces school boards to educate and discipline their students. It dictates fines and community service to those who are guilty of cyberbullying. It empowers judges to order restrictions on the use of electronic devices, including the power to confiscate them if it is deemed needed. It also recognizes that parents have a role in the prevention of cyberbullying and holds parents legally responsible if their children are guilty of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is a plague upon our nation. I congratulate Jamie Baillie on taking strong action to stand up to it.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FORT TÉMISCAMINGUE OBADJIWAN**

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservative government's thoughtless cuts prove that it does not care about the regions.

For example, Parks Canada's Fort Témiscamingue Obadjiwan is a tourist destination in my riding. Over 8,000 people visit every year, generating significant spinoffs for the region's tourism industry. The Témiscamingue community contributed over \$500,000 to the creation of the visitor information centre, but the government's cuts will shorten the summer season and put an end to guided tours. Five jobs are in danger.

A major development project involving tourism stakeholders in both Ontario and Quebec is under way at Lake Timiskaming. Fort Témiscamingue is supposed to be the centrepiece of the initiative. These cuts will have a devastating impact on our region, which has diversified its economic activities but which has been abandoned now that the investments have been made.

Our region is trying to keep its head above water, but the government could not care less about our efforts and is slashing our economic resources.

\* \* \*

[English]

**CHILD PORNOGRAPHY**

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the RCMP and the Kids' Internet Safety Alliance estimate there are more than two million pornographic pictures and movies, involving 50,000 different children worldwide, that can be found on the Internet. The vast majority of this vile material involves young children, some as young as two or three years old. Only 2,500 of these children have been identified and rescued.

As many as 200,000 men in Canada are regularly trading, selling and producing child pornography. One out of three men who possess child pornography are child abusers.

This is a community safety issue of the highest priority. Sadly, Canadian police were only able to arrest 513 people in 2010 for child pornography offences. Why? Because they hide behind the Internet and make themselves anonymous.

It is the duty of the House to ensure that law enforcement has the legal tools it needs to find and prosecute these offenders, to make the Internet a safer place and to protect our children.

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**ST. BASIL-THE-GREAT COLLEGE SCHOOL**

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member of Parliament for York West, I am incredibly pleased to recognize the past and present faculty and students of St. Basil-the-Great College School in Toronto as they commemorate their 50th anniversary.

For half a century, St. Basil-the-Great College School has been shaping young minds by transforming children into productive and contributing members of our society. At the same time, the school has become an essential part of the surrounding neighbourhood by demonstrating the cardinal virtues of charity, family and community betterment.

As part of the 50th anniversary celebrations, alumni will come together next week to compare notes, share life stories and to demonstrate how education and their faith have helped make them who they are today.

I look forward to hearing those inspirational stories. I would again congratulate the school on 50 years of making a difference.

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**SUMMER IN THE PARK FESTIVAL**

**Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I want to recognize the continued success of the Summer in the Park Festival in my riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming.

*Statements by Members*

This year the North Bay waterfront will be visited by thousands when world-famous acts such as Meat Loaf and Marianas Trench take to the stage alongside regional musicians. Local performers also get to step in the spotlight when they participate in the Northern Ontario Open Country Singing Contest.

With so much to do, it is not surprising that Summer in the Park has been named as one of the top 100 festivals in Ontario. Summer in the Park takes place in early August in the beautiful Goulet Golden Mile, named in honour of former North Bay mayor Bruce Goulet. Bruce celebrated his 90th birthday yesterday and is truly a model citizen.

I am very proud of our summer festival and encourage all my fellow members and all Canadians to attend and enjoy the festival in beautiful Nipissing—Timiskaming.

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• (1405)

[Translation]

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament, it is my duty here today to denounce Bill C-38 as an affront to democracy.

This bill shows contempt for Canadians. Logically, this bill should be divided into six separate parts and each of those parts should be studied in a parliamentary committee.

Worse still, this bill further reinforces Canadians' distrust, as they no longer have any confidence in the Conservative government.

As parliamentarians, are we going to be forced to ask people to take to the streets to defend democracy? I am beginning to wonder if that is the only solution.

Is there not some way for us to work together in a positive manner, regardless of our political affiliation, in order to get results for Canadians and communities, and to make more compassionate decisions that reflect the wishes of the people we represent?

Arrogance always has its price. If the government goes ahead with Bill C-38, Canadians will remember in 2015.

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[English]

**MEDICAL IMAGING TEAM DAY**

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a former medical radiation technologist, I am honoured to stand before members today and call attention to the inaugural Medical Imaging Team Day event taking place on Parliament Hill. Medical Imaging Team Day has been established to recognize the contribution that the imaging team, comprised of physicians, physicists, sonographers and technologists, makes to the Canadian health care system.

Today I salute the following groups that are taking part in Medical Imaging Team Day: the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists, the Canadian Association of Nuclear Medicine, the Canadian Association of Radiologists, the Canadian Interventional

Radiology Association, the Canadian Organization of Medical Physicists and the Canadian Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers. I thank these groups for their vital contributions to Canadian health care.

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**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to announce that at last night's vote, my private member's Bill C-316 passed its third reading and is on its way to the Senate.

This legislation would change the provisions in the Employment Insurance Act that would allow convicted offenders to receive extensions to their EI qualifying and benefit periods that were not available to honest, hard-working Canadians. Bill C-316 would change the law so that people found guilty of crimes would no longer have their qualifying or benefit periods extended by their time spent in jail and no longer give them preferential treatment over honest, hard-working Canadians.

I thank my colleagues for supporting this bill and seeing it pass so we can continue to support Canadians who work hard and obey the law.

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**MEMORIAL CUP**

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I stand before the members as a man who has been humbled, following a wager I had with the member for Saint John, whose riding is represented by the Sea Dogs. The Sea Dogs won fair and square and swept l'Océanic de Rimouski in four games.

Therefore, I wish to congratulate the Sea Dogs for an excellent season and wish them good luck representing the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League at the Memorial Cup starting very soon in Shawinigan.

[Translation]

So again, congratulations to the Saint John Sea Dogs and best of luck at the Memorial Cup.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Rimouski Océanic on their fantastic season. Most experts expected the Océanic to finish last or second-last in their division. After eliminating Val-d'Or, Blainville-Boisbriand and Halifax, the Océanic made it to the league finals, which is an amazing feat.

I would also like to commend the hard work of three 20-year-old players who now have to leave the team: Alex Belzile of Saint-Éloi, team captain Jean-Philippe Mathieu and Pier-Luc Pelletier. I would also like to thank all the 19-year-old players and the European players who will not be returning. I extend special thanks to the general manager, Philippe Boucher; his assistant, Yannick Dumais; and the head coach, Serge Beausoleil. I would like to thank them all for treating us to some great hockey this season. Thanks again.

Go, Nics, go!

*Statements by Members*

●(1410)

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

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP is trying to mislead Canadians and concoct an economic policy that would be bad for Canada's provinces and bad for employment.

The leader of the NDP is fixated on development of our natural resources. He even goes so far as to say that our natural resources have a disease.

According to him, developing natural resources such as fossil fuels in the western provinces is bad for employment in Quebec. The leader of the NDP is wrong. Canada's natural resources are giving us a unique opportunity to create thousands of jobs and generate billions of dollars that will translate into economic prosperity across the country.

The NDP and its leader are just making things up and trying to divide the country in order to make political gains.

It is totally irresponsible.

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*[English]***SRI LANKA**

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, May 19 marks the third anniversary of the end of the armed conflict of the Sri Lankan civil war. The 26-year conflict saw the death of an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 people, and thousands more were displaced from their homes. Many of the displaced, like my family and many of my constituents, fled the country to seek safety in great countries like Canada.

Humanitarian organizations continue their work in postwar Sri Lanka, providing emergency medical relief for the internally displaced. Reports of continuing abductions and torture, systemic lack of basic security for women, increasing lack of freedom of information, illegal settlement of the northern areas and a lack of religious and linguistic freedoms for minorities are ongoing.

The victims on both sides of this conflict have waited too long for justice. On the anniversary of the end of the civil war, New Democrats call upon this government and the world to take firm action to hold Sri Lanka to account and push for an independent inquiry into the allegations that war crimes and crimes against humanity took place during this time of conflict.

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

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP was completely wrong when he called northern Ontario's energy industry and the jobs it has created a "disease". Northern Ontario is a vital part of both Ontario's and Canada's economy. Mining in the Ring of Fire, a growing forest industry and the creation of thousands of new jobs are by no means a disease.

Just as they were silenced from supporting the end of Canada's long gun registry, NDP members from northern Ontario must now accept the demeaning message by their leader for our region. The work their constituents are proud to do is not a disease.

The NDP leader's ill-informed position is dangerous, divisive and downright wrong. We are proud of the work we do in northern Ontario and of our future. I would say to the leader of the NDP that what we do in northern Ontario is not a disease.

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**INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, each year on May 17, we recognize the International Day Against Homophobia to end discrimination based on sexual orientation.

*[Translation]*

Here in Canada, under Liberal governments, we have seen the decriminalization of same-sex relationships, the legalization of same-sex marriage and the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Canadian Human Rights Act.

*[English]*

But we must not rest on our laurels. Homophobia is still too prevalent, and many gay and lesbian youth are still victims of bullying and discrimination, too often leading to tragic consequences. Days like today give our young people hope that it does indeed get better.

*[Translation]*

We must continue to fight this form of discrimination here and around the world, especially in countries such as Uganda, Nigeria and Russia, which have recently implemented homophobic and discriminatory policies.

*[English]*

Today, the Liberal caucus honours those who have fought tirelessly to secure the rights of the LGBTQ community by fighting homophobia here in Canada and around the world.

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

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for the second time this month, the Premier of Alberta is correcting the federal NDP leader. She is now calling him divisive and ill-informed after his recent comments calling hard-working Albertans a "disease".

The premier is right: the NDP leader's remarks do not display national leadership. She said that she expects someone would have the courtesy to properly inform themselves instead of making disparaging comments about Alberta and Albertans.

The Deputy Premier also pointed out that Canada's oil sands generate more jobs in Ontario than the auto industry does. The IRPP has confirmed that the auto sector was not impacted by the theories that the NDP leader espouses. His comments calling hard-working Albertans a “disease” are outrageous, ill-informed and unacceptable.

I call upon the NDP leader to apologize to Albertans and stand up for Canadians across this country in every—

• (1415)

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

\* \* \*

#### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government's continued attacks on employment insurance are disingenuous, disrespectful and downright disgraceful.

First the changes to the EI system were hidden in the government's massive Trojan Horse omnibus bill. Then the minister said she would provide details only after the bill is passed. Now it seems that no one across the aisle understands what it is like to struggle to make ends meet after losing a job.

According to the human resources minister, EI makes it “lucrative” for Canadians to stay home and get paid for it.

The Prime Minister once said that people who are unemployed “... don't feel bad about it themselves as long as they're receiving generous social assistance and unemployment insurance”.

As well, of course, there is the Minister of Finance, who thinks refereeing hockey games while building a future at law school is the same as a lifetime of back-breaking work in a mine shaft.

It is time the government stopped being part of the unemployment problem and started being part of the solution.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### CANADIAN NATIONAL RESOURCES LIMITED

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadian National Resources Limited is a major oil company working at developing the oil sands. One of its largest shareholders is the Régie des rentes du Québec, the board that pays Quebecers pensions. This oil company currently pays the Régie des rentes enough dividends to cover the pensions of 1,100 Quebecers.

The NDP leader calls these oil companies a disease. Does he believe that Quebec pensioners are also a disease?

[English]

Another example is the Canada Post pension plan, which is invested in oil sands giant Suncor. That company pays back dividends to the pensioners of the Canada Post pension fund.

We cannot harm, therefore, an Alberta energy company without harming the retired postal worker or the Quebec pensioner.

That is why the NDP's campaign of class envy and regional jealousy can never win. From pensioners to workers, east to west,

#### Oral Questions

French to English, our destinies are intertwined, our future shared, our country united. We are truly in it together.

### ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

#### CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservative government is on a witch hunt. This time, it asked the RCMP to investigate an article shedding light on the untendered procurement process for the F-35 jets. Daniel Leblanc of the *The Globe and Mail* did not reveal national secrets, he revealed a national embarrassment.

The embarrassment is that the Conservative government broke every rule of sound public administration to purchase a plane that does not even work.

Who in the Conservative government ordered the police to investigate a journalist?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** The Leader of the Opposition's version of the facts is completely false. The fact is that the government is responsible for protecting sensitive information and cabinet documents must remain secret. That is why the Clerk of the Privy Council took appropriate action to protect the public interest.

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, laws on government secrecy exist to protect real national secrets, not embarrassments to the Prime Minister. The article in *The Globe and Mail* said the government “...is refusing to open up the \$16-billion purchase of 65 new fighter jets to a competition because of the potential negative reaction in the United States...”.

The Prime Minister might take issue with the truth, but it does not justify calling the cops, it does not justify intimidating reporters and it certainly does not justify attacking freedom of the press.

Is this the point we have reached in this country—having police investigate journalists who are only doing their jobs?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is not at all what happened. The government has an obligation to protect sensitive information, and the Clerk of the Privy Council took appropriate action.

Since the Leader of the Opposition raised the question of “national embarrassments”, I am wondering when the Leader of the Opposition will apologize to western Canadians for suggesting that the strength of the western Canadian economy is a “disease” on Canada. He even admitted yesterday that he had not even been to the oil sands in western Canada.

He attacks western Canada, he attacks our energy industry, he attacks all of the west and the great work that is being done by western Canadians to contribute to Canada's national unity. He should be ashamed of himself.

*Oral Questions*

• (1420)

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, they are leaving the largest ecological, economic and social debt in history on the backs of future generations. We know what the problem is. It is the way we are developing them.

No one is saying we should not develop the oil sands. We are saying we don't—

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

**The Speaker:** Order. Order, please.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair:** Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder the Conservatives received the Canadian award for most secretive government in history a couple of weeks ago from our journalists, but this is not run-of-the-mill Conservative secrecy. It is vindictive, it is vicious and it is illegal. One government department went so far as to check the home address of *Globe and Mail* reporter Daniel Leblanc.

Why? Why is the public service being enlisted to run a witch hunt on journalists?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is not at all what happened, and the Leader of the Opposition is not going to change the subject.

The fact is, the Leader of the Opposition is attacking western Canada when it comes to our national resources. The Premier of Alberta, the Premier of Saskatchewan and the Premier of British Columbia are calling out the Leader of the Opposition for his unwarranted attack on western Canada, on our energy industry and on the thousands of jobs it is creating across western Canada.

He should be ashamed of himself for attacking the west, dividing this country, and not even having visited the places he is attacking. It is unconscionable for someone who wants to be the prime minister of the country to be so utterly irresponsible.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 500,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs have been lost because we are not enforcing legislation. We are not enforcing the navigable waters act. We are not enforcing the migratory birds act. We are not enforcing the Fisheries Act. We are allowing these companies to use the air, the soil and the water as an unlimited free dumping ground. Their model for development is Nigeria instead of Norway. We know what we want: it is sustainable development to protect future generations.

Yesterday we found out another part of the government's development process: telling teachers and therapists in Newfoundland to go work in the mines. Is that the Conservatives' idea of an economy—telling people that they have to go work in the mines, telling them that they are lazy Newfoundlanders?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there he goes again, attacking the west and he has not even been there.

He wants to talk about job creation. We are more than glad to talk about job creation. Under our Prime Minister and our government, 750,000 jobs have been created. There are 90% of those jobs that are full-time jobs and 80% of those jobs that are in the private sector. As a matter of fact, just in the last two months the Canadian economy has created more jobs than at any other time in more than 30 years. That is the Conservative record.

The NDP approach is to attack the west, divide Canadians and attack parts of this country that he has never even been to. He should be ashamed of himself.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are destabilizing the balanced economy that Canada has painstakingly built up since the second world war, sacrificing the entire manufacturing sector and all other export sectors, because the Canadian dollar is being held artificially high, because they are failing to enforce environmental legislation. The high number of U.S. dollars is bringing the Canadian dollar too high, hurting all export sectors.

That is the result of choices. Their priority is the unbridled development of the oil sands. We stand for sustainable development in this country.

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I notice the Liberal Party is seeing the resuscitation of themselves and the meltdown of the NDP leader as he tries to divide Canadians over the economy.

The fact is the Canadian economy is doing extraordinarily well. As I said, there were more jobs in the last two months, the best job record that Canada has seen in over 30 years.

If the leader of the NDP would at least have the dignity to go to the west and actually visit the people whose economy he says is a disease in this country, he might start the pathway back to a little bit of dignity for the Leader of the Opposition.

The fact is, western Canada is driving the Canadian economy. We are the future. We are creating jobs for all of this country and we are very proud of it.

\* \* \*

• (1425)

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I can bring things from Nigeria a little closer to home.

I wonder if I might ask the spokesman for the government this question today. I met this morning with representatives of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. It was a very positive and constructive discussion, and one of the things we discussed was the issue of employment insurance. They themselves were saying they were baffled by the number of different statements being made by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, and the complete lack of clarity with respect to what exactly the change is that the government intends to bring forward.

Can the minister please tell us why it is reasonable for the government to ask the House to approve a change which it has not yet seen?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our policies on employment insurance have been clear before the House. We believe that Canadians are entitled to employment insurance when and where they need it, and that Canadians who have paid into the system have an entitlement to those rights. We also want to make sure the Canadian economy continues to grow and goes in the right direction. The changes the leader of the Liberal Party is looking for and has sought are in fact in the budget implementation act.

We tabled our budget in the House almost two months ago. We have had a lot of debate on this. We are pleased to see our budget progressing through the House of Commons, and we look forward to a continuation of the debate, not only on EI but on how we can ensure the Canadian economy will serve all Canadians in all regions.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the minister would never want to mislead the House.

He said that the changes are in the bill. Unfortunately, he is completely wrong and the changes are not in the bill. What is in the bill is the elimination of important protective measures that are found in the existing legislation.

To date, the government has refused to tell us or Canadian workers and employers what is going to replace the sections that are being eliminated.

When will we see the definitions, substitutions and regulations? That is what we want.

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, protective measures for those who need the system are not being eliminated. The protective measures are there. We will certainly continue to promote them and add to them in order to strengthen protection.

All Canadians should have access to the existing system when they need it. That is what we are doing in the budget. We have done so all along—from 2006 until today. Other changes have been made. We debated them and passed them into law.

We will continue on this path, because it is important that all Canadians in every region of the country have access to the system when they need it.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**PENSIONS**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that those new definitions are simply not in any information we have been given. They are in the musings of cabinet ministers opposite and we have had another philosophical discourse from the minister speaking on behalf of the government.

We still have this contradiction with respect to the old age security and guaranteed income supplement. The government members tell us there is a crisis and that it is going to be resolved in 2023, but they will not tell us how much they think they would be saving.

How can the government say there is a fiscal crisis with respect to the affordability of the plan and yet not have any idea as to what the return to the taxpayers is going to be?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what we are saving is a system of retirement for all Canadians, for current retirees, for those who depend on OAS today and those who will depend on it tomorrow. I think all Canadians are entitled to a retirement that has a steady income and a good quality of life.

The changes we propose to the OAS system would begin in 2023 and be fully implemented by 2029. We have put them before the House and they have been debated now for more than two months.

It is the right way to go. This is a modest improvement that we think would ensure our system is there for all Canadians for many generations to come.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, workers are worried, and so they should be. They have paid into the employment insurance fund their whole lives, and now the government wants to force them to move, uprooting their families from their homes, just to prevent them from collecting employment insurance benefits.

Can the Conservatives guarantee that no worker who has lost a job will be forced to either move to find a new job elsewhere or forfeit employment insurance benefits?

• (1430)

[*English*]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is facing unprecedented skills shortages across the country. We need to make sure unemployed Canadians have access to getting a job quickly.

These changes will help connect unemployed Canadians with jobs they want and desire with the skills they have, and match them in their local areas. We have said this numerous times: Canadians will be expected to take available jobs in their local communities that match their qualifications.

I do not understand why the NDP does not want to get on board to make sure Canadians have jobs.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have lost all credibility because they speak out of both sides of their collective mouth. First they avoided the question; then they consulted unemployed workers and insulted them; and finally, they encouraged Aveos workers to go work in a mine in Labrador or build boats.

Yesterday, the Minister of State for Finance said, “I believe I have already defined what constitutes suitable employment.” But he did not.

*Oral Questions*

Can he provide us with the new definition of suitable employment in light of the changes in the budget implementation bill?

[*English*]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this is about making sure individuals have an opportunity to be employed in the skills area they have.

Let us talk about what the opposition members had to say. Let us make sure we are focused on what is happening. We do not believe it is a colossal waste to be a taxi driver or work on a farm to make sure one is supporting one's family so they have a good quality of life.

We want to make sure that Canadians have jobs. That is why we created 700,000 net new jobs in the last mandate. We look forward to them supporting our initiatives.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, employees pay into EI in good faith, but under the Conservatives fewer than 40% even qualify, and they want to restrict the rules even more.

The Conservatives claim they have no plans to force Canadians to choose between EI eligibility and relocating to other parts of the country. We know now the idea was not only being discussed, it was also focus-grouped.

Canadians deserve to know the truth. Will the minister table all of the planned changes to EI in this House?

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we support and applaud the millions of Canadians who work hard every single day to improve their lives and that of their families.

The economic action plan is committed to and has increased efforts to better connect Canadians who are unemployed with opportunities for employment. Our government has been very clear: we will connect Canadians with available jobs in their local areas.

The study in question did not inform the policy discussion that took place in this House. I look forward to the NDP finally getting on board to support a jobs plan for this country.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are all over the map on this.

We have the Minister of Finance who compares his summer jobs at school to unemployed teachers looking for work, while the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development thinks EI is too lucrative.

One day the Conservatives are holding focus groups about encouraging people to relocate, and the next thing they are up in the House denying it.

EI belongs to the people who paid into it, not the Conservatives. Why will it not table its plans in this House for everybody to see?

**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 say it once again: Canada is facing unprecedented skills shortages.

We have a huge challenge making sure that individuals who have available skills have an opportunity to have the jobs they are qualified for. This means we are going to be connecting unemployed Canadians with opportunities in their local areas.

The NDP can say what it wants, but we have created 750,000 net new jobs in this country throughout the course of the economic action plan.

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**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it was shocking to hear the Minister of Health attack the UN food rapporteur for bringing attention to the issue of food insecurity amongst first nations, Inuit and Métis, especially because the head of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Mary Simon, supports his findings. Seventy percent of Inuit households with young children do not have access to safe and secure food.

The government is ignoring the facts. The first step is admitting there is a problem. Will the minister at least do that?

• (1435)

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the UN rapporteur should look to his own country's position on the seal hunt and its impact on the Canadian Inuit.

How dare he come to Canada to study us, once again from afar, and declare what is best for us as Inuit in our country. He should look at the European Union position on the seal hunt and the impact on food security of Canadian Inuit, instead of coming here to tell us what to do and what is best for us.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government's own numbers talk about this lack of access to food.

In 2008, Health Canada reported that aboriginal households are three times less likely than non-aboriginal households to have access to safe and secure food.

Is the government now going to attack Health Canada? Why does the government think it is acceptable for children living in this country to wake up hungry, to go to school hungry, and to go to bed hungry? Instead of attacking, will the government now act to solve this very real problem?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday what surprised me was the UN rapporteur's lack of understanding and knowledge about the aboriginal people, Inuit and their dependence on hunting wildlife for food security in Canada's Arctic.



*Oral Questions*

What this amounts to is an academic study of aboriginal people in Canada's Arctic without ever setting foot on our grounds, walking in our footsteps and understanding some of the limitations as well as the incredible opportunities we have as aboriginal people in this country.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the UN special rapporteur said that all costs, including transportation costs, should be taken into account in the selection of foods to subsidize for remote northern communities. The Conservatives are abdicating their responsibility toward aboriginal communities with respect to food security and infrastructure. That is why the Assembly of First Nations applauded the rapporteur's conclusions.

Instead of shooting the messenger, will they finally start working with communities to make nutritious food available at a reasonable cost?

[English]

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this academic is so ill-informed that he has no idea what our government invests in several initiatives that promote nutrition and improved access to traditional, country and healthy food

Like the Liberals, they like to talk about food security, but at the same time, like the UN rapporteur's home country, they are trying to shut down the seal hunt. The European UN representative coming to Canada from afar to study us and lecture us is as ridiculous as a certain MP from Toronto saying I do not understand issues affecting my hometown and the north.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government launched a shameful attack on the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, including saying that he had not visited the north.

The government is wrong. He visited Gods River in northern Manitoba and went to northern Alberta. What he found out was that many Canadians, especially aboriginal Canadians, have inadequate diets because they live in poverty.

Will the government apologize for this shameful attack and finally face the facts that aboriginal—

**The Speaker:** The member is out of time.

The hon. Minister of Health.

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I said yesterday was that I was very insulted by the UN rapporteur coming to Canada to study aboriginal people, Inuit, and not come to the Arctic, and to write a report on what is best for me as an aboriginal person from Canada's Arctic is insulting.

That member should be ashamed of herself. She should support the people and the aboriginal people in this country and not listen to a person who comes to our country and dictates on how we live our lives on the land and how we depend upon the wildlife in our country.

● (1440)

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as an open and active member of the United Nations, Canada has a long-standing invitation for all UN human rights officials to visit our country. However, when the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food took up this invitation, he was welcomed by the government with insults to his education and attacks on his mandate. Worse yet, when a government member attacked him in a statement, the Minister of Foreign Affairs applauded.

Is this the way a government of a G8 country is supposed to treat visitors from the UN? Is this a new policy of the government?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member opposite and all Canadians what the policy of this government is. It is to stand up for Canada, to stand up for Canadian interests and to stand up for Canadian values. We will do that each and every day.

I want to tell all members of the House how proud I am and how proud this government is of the Minister of Health for the absolutely outstanding job she has done for all Canadians as Minister of Health and, particularly, her approach to bringing the views of Inuit people to cabinet. She has done a phenomenal job, and we are tremendously proud of her.

\* \* \*

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 13 days remain until the government must decide whether to appeal the decision of the Federal Court ordering it to cease clawing back veterans' pensions from people like Dennis Manuge.

It has been almost three weeks, and we still have no indication of what the government will do. We are still not sure whether the Minister of National Defence has managed to read the 31-page court decision.

The Conservatives have two choices: appeal the Federal Court decision or do the honourable thing and accept it. Which is it?

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the Government of Canada is currently studying the decision and considering the next steps.

No decision has been made at this point in time, so it is premature to assume that any decision has been taken or will be taken until such time as we make up our minds as to what needs to be done.

\* \* \*

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, since the Conservatives have forgotten, I will remind the government of its promises for 5 Wing Goose Bay: a 650-member rapid reaction battalion and a 100-member UAV squadron.

Who made these promises? The problem minister, the Minister of National Defence, and the Prime Minister himself. They said, "It'll all be in the defence plan. Don't worry". They will say anything for a vote. All we have seen is more broken promises.

### Oral Questions

For 30 years, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs campaigned to get the military out of Labrador. Is he happy now that he seems to be getting his wish?

**Hon. Peter Penashue (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can reaffirm that our government is working to fulfill our commitment for an operational mandate for 5 Wing Goose Bay that takes advantage of a unique location and enhances the protection of Canadian sovereignty, including in the Arctic.

Since 2006, our government has consistently worked to ensure the future viability of 5 Wing Goose Bay through investments, such as runway resurfacing and decontaminating sites around the base.

\* \* \*

### HEALTH

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday Manitoba Grand Chief Nepinak said, "I've never seen the minister come to Manitoba to visit the remote communities that I was able to take the rapporteur to, so I would trust the observations of the rapporteur ahead of the health minister at this time".

Why does the government deny the problem of food and security among first nations, Inuit and Métis instead of working with the communities to find the real solutions?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will talk about the UN rapporteur. He is so ill-informed that he has no idea what our government is doing to invest in nutrition north programs promoting a number of health program initiatives throughout the country.

The Liberals like to talk about food security, but at the same time, like the UN rapporteur, are trying to shut down the seal hunt, which is important to aboriginal people.

The member and the Liberal Senate bill basically state that they are of the same colour.

\* \* \*

●(1445)

[Translation]

### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, at the Conservatives' request, the RCMP was required to investigate a journalist's article confirming that the Conservatives were going to buy the F-35s without a competitive bidding process.

The Conservatives' attempts to conceal the facts from Canadians are completely appalling. The department of propaganda has reached a new low. Trying to conceal poor management practices under the guise of national security is inexcusable.

Why did the Conservatives request an investigation based on an article that exposed their mismanagement?

[English]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the RCMP was asked by the Clerk of the Privy Council to

look into a possible unauthorized disclosure of confidential information, which is done from time to time.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is just another example of the Conservatives lashing out at those who tell the truth.

According to *DefenseNews*, the U.S. house appropriations committee is recommending an additional \$5.3 billion for everything from aircraft, vehicles, ships and weapons, everything but the F-35. In fact, it actually wants to cut the F-35 program by \$530 million because of cost increases and delays.

Who will the Conservatives lash out against when the truth is coming from the U.S. Congress?

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, far from lashing out at anybody, this is the government that put in place the resources necessary to ensure that our military can do the job we ask of it.

This government is committed to supporting the Canadian Forces. We are committed to ensuring that we do all that we can to enable members of the Canadian Forces to carry out their responsibilities in a way that also addresses the needs of Canadians.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of accountability, yet another source of assistance for Canadian Forces members in need of help has been found wanting.

Complaints of a poisonous work environment, 50% staff turnover and delays of up to five years to resolve issues of support for mental health needs, while soldiers returning from Afghanistan are more than ever seeking fair and just treatment from the government.

How can Canadian Forces members and their families have confidence that the government cares about their needs?

What will the minister and the government do to ensure that the office of the ombudsman does the job that it was set up to do?

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the issues and the Minister of National Defence has ordered an investigation to look into some of these items. We are receiving the report and we will act on those recommendations as soon as they are made available to us.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, again on accountability, the Prime Minister promised in 2006, 2008 and again in 2011 to put a 650-member rapid reaction battalion at CFB Goose Bay, plus a UAV squadron. There was also a pledge to create a territorial defence battalion of 100 regular forces and 400 reservists in St. John's. Both of these promises have been broken. There is nothing for Goose Bay, and the Minister of National Defence says that a territorial battalion group will be set up in 10 cities, from Vancouver to Halifax.

*Oral Questions*

Why can the government not be trusted to keep its promises? Why does the government not keep its commitments to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

**Hon. Peter Penashue (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can reaffirm that our government is working to fulfill our commitment for an operational mandate for 5 Wing Goose Bay that takes advantage of its unique location and enhances the protection of Canadian sovereignty, including in the Arctic.

Since 2006, our government has consistently worked to ensure the future viability of Goose Bay through investments, such as runway resurfacing and decontaminating sites around the base.

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**POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING**

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in 2006, we ended big business and big union political contributions through the Federal Accountability Act. We believe that money for political activities should come from ordinary Canadians who choose to donate, not big corporations, not big unions and not government.

That is why our government continued to take action by ending the direct subsidy to political parties.

Could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform update the House on how much money taxpayers are saving through this initiative?

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is delivering on its commitment to phase out the \$30 million per year taxpayer subsidy of political parties. Today I am happy to report that this year taxpayers will save \$8 million as a result of our government's actions.

Unfortunately, it is not surprising that the big tax, big government NDP voted to keep this easy subsidy. This disrespect for taxpayers' money is typical of the NDP.

Political parties should do their own fundraising and not live off taxpayer-funded handouts.

\* \* \*

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

**G20 SUMMIT**

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the report on police actions during the G20 came down yesterday like a ton of bricks. First of all, the temporary detention facility did not meet the most rudimentary standards. Furthermore, illegal mass arrests were made, and finally, excessive violence was used.

None of this would have happened if the government had focused more on organizing the summit rather than creating the G8 slush fund.

Will this government admit its responsibility in this fiasco?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP found that the RCMP acted appropriately and reasonably.

The NDP has made wild allegations about the actions of our national police force, such as, "Canada is becoming a police state, where the toe of an officer's boot or punch in the gut is the rule of law".

I cannot comment on the actions by provincial or municipal authorities, but I find that kind of comment by the NDP about our police forces to be despicable.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the G20 summit left Toronto with a fake lake, broken glass and the biggest mass arrest in Canadian history. Who created this chaos? That government when it chose the Toronto venue four months before the summit.

The provincial report says that some of the planning was "rushed and inadequate". As a result, law enforcement officers were thrown in unprepared.

This was either Conservative incompetence or malice toward the people of Toronto. Which is it?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from the report of the Commissioner for Public Complaints. He is clear. He states, "The RCMP planning process was robust and thorough".

However, I have not heard that member try to defend the scurrilous comments that his party has been making against police officers, such as, "Canada is becoming a police state where the toe of an officer's boot or punch in the gut is the rule of law".

That is what the NDP views our police forces as.

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**CANADIAN HERITAGE**

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives simply refuse to take responsibility for their mistakes. Here is another one.

Last week, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages wanted, oh, a friendship. This week he is interfering with respected professional museum staff. He called a highly regarded exhibit insulting to the taxpayer. The same exhibit did not even cause a stir in Regina or Montreal.

It is not the 1950s. It is important we talk about sex with our kids. When will the Conservatives stop launching attacks on anyone that gets—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I believe in the independence of our museums and I also believe in sex education. The director of the museum asked me to view the exhibit. Unlike the member opposite, I have actually seen the exhibit and I respect the independence of the museum. However, I was asked for my opinion and, in my opinion, it is not appropriate for young children to be exposed to sexually explicit material without the consent of their parents. I made that view known to the museum.

The museum can make its own decisions about its own direction and its own exhibits. I made my view known, and it is up to the museum to decide now where it goes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Molière wrote, “Cover up that bosom, which I cannot endure to look on”. The Conservatives are getting up on their high horses over an exhibit in a museum. I cannot believe what prudes they are.

The exhibit was very successful when it was on display in Montreal, and no holier-than-thou hypocrites were offended. After all, sex education is not the devil's work.

Will the minister promise to stop meddling in the exhibit decisions of Canadian museums, or will the department of censorship blacklist anything that it does not agree with?

• (1455)

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, frankly, the museum can make its own decisions about its programming. It is up to the museum's representatives to make this type of decision independently.

[*English*]

As I said, museums operate at arm's length. This is its decision to make. It is also its responsibility to reflect the public's views on this. I know this has stirred a great deal of controversy. The future of this exhibit is up to the museum.

As I said, I believe in the independence of museums and I believe in sex education, but these things have to be handled with care, and I encourage the museum to do so.

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**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on October 27, 2006, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism said, “we are not going to allow people to jump the queue and get ahead of...people who are trying to come here by regular means”.

On April 7, 2008, another minister said, “we are tackling the backlog...putting more resources into it: \$22 million...and then \$37 million a year after that”. In this budget, the Conservatives are deleting the backlog.

Why is the government eradicating these applications? These are lives, not files. When will the Prime Minister appoint someone who can do the job?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when this government came to office in 2006, after 13 years of Liberal neglect and incompetence with respect to our immigration system, we inherited 840,000 people waiting in the Liberal immigration backlog for decisions for up to seven or eight years. That member belonged to the government that allowed seven- and eight-year wait times to develop.

Thanks to the action we have taken, consistently opposed by the Liberal Party, we have managed to cut the skilled worker backlog in half. Now we are going to a just-in-time immigration system that will accept newcomers within months rather than years. We are cleaning up the Liberals' mess.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has it wrong. He is the problem. He is the one causing the issues with regard to the backlog. That is the reality of it.

There is a two-year freeze for parents, no more moms and dads because of that minister. Tens of thousands of skilled workers are being told “no more, hit the delete button”. That is how the Conservatives are getting rid of the backlog. It is a cruel policy that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is implementing.

Why has the Prime Minister appointed such a cruel immigration minister?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let us recall the Liberal record on immigration. When the Liberals came to office, what is the first thing they did? They cut immigration by a third between 1993 and 1997. The second thing they did was immediately impose a \$1,000 head tax on all newcomers to Canada. The third thing they did was to cut settlement funding for newcomers to Canada. The fourth thing they did was, through incompetence, run up a backlog of 840,000 newcomers in our system waiting for seven or eight years.

We are proud of our record of cleaning up the problems that we inherited from the Liberals in our immigration system.

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**JUSTICE**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my God, I do not know what is in the water today.

[*Translation*]

A year ago, the Conservatives solemnly swore that they would not reopen the abortion debate, yet members of the Conservative anti-choice caucus are at work in churches across the country. The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is circulating a petition in churches with a view to amending section 223 of the Criminal Code, which would open the door to criminalizing abortion. Canadian law is clear: women have the right to choose.

Why do the Conservatives want to use a parliamentary secretary to reopen the abortion debate?

*Oral Questions*

[English]

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

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, before I get attacked by the Conservative MPs, I just want to say, so that they do not misunderstand me, that I am not trying to prevent them from preaching the good news in churches. That being said, when they promote their anti-choice political campaign, women have cause to be concerned.

That is not all. The comments made this morning by the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin border on hysteria. To him, abortion is nothing less than bullying causing death.

If the Prime Minister is serious about not wanting to reopen the abortion debate, then let him stand up and rein in his caucus member. Otherwise, we will assume the Prime Minister condones these comments.

• (1500)

[English]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been very clear. We are not reopening the debate.

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**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader's attack on the west is repulsive. Yesterday, B.C.'s finance minister called out the NDP leader for his incredibly stupid and ignorant comments about the role of natural resources in Canada's economy.

In British Columbia, natural resources have been an important part of our economy since before Confederation. Will the government please tell the House just how its plan for a strong and diverse economy in B.C. and across Canada includes the natural resources of the country?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why for 19 years the constituents of the member for Cariboo—Prince George have trusted him to represent their interests in the House of Commons. It is because he understands something about the west that the Leader of the Opposition does not, which is that western Canada's economy is indeed contributing to all of Canada's economy. The energy industry in Alberta, the forest industry in British Columbia and the mining sector all across western Canada is employing Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

It is not about the west versus everybody else, like the Leader of the Opposition plays it as. Developing our natural resources, uniting Canadians, creating wealth and creating jobs is good for British Columbia and good for all Canadians. That is what we understand. That is what the NDP apparently never will.

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government just celebrated its sixth year in government and it has so much to applaud: the largest deficits in the history of the country, \$100 million added to the national debt, and forcing seniors and disabled people to work until they are 67. That deserves a great deal of applause.

However, the biggest blunder yet, the biggest cock-up, is what the government is doing to EI. I ask this question on behalf of mayors and wardens in rural communities across the country who fight with out-migration on a regular basis. Whose ignorant and stupid idea was that?

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are spending our time matching Canadian workers with available jobs because it is critical right now to support the economy and productivity. That is why we are committed to connecting Canadians with available jobs in their local areas, which I have mentioned before.

Unlike the opposition members, though, who do not believe that working on a farm or a construction site, driving a taxi or being a referee is a good job, we want to ensure that Canadians have access to jobs in their local areas with their qualifications.

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**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when Canadian military personnel serve their country, they do not get to make up their minds. They follow orders. Unfortunately, many of them become disabled. Over 6,500 disabled veterans and their leader Dennis Manuge are asking the government to stop the appeal of Justice Barnes' decision to end the SISIP clawback.

These are the heroes of our country. Unfortunately, they served their country and became disabled. Two different judges have ruled to stop the SISIP clawback. Will the government now serve these disabled people by stopping the legal proceedings, meet with Dennis Manuge's legal team and pay out the money they so rightfully deserve?

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting our veterans and those who have served our country so ably. I would like to also point out for the member that the government has stood up for our veterans and brought a number of programs, which I can list.

In that regard, we are also saying, once and for all, that we will not be second to anyone when it comes to looking after our men and women in uniform, those who serve today and those who have served very ably in the past.

*Points of Order*

● (1505)

**TOURISM INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is getting things done. This morning we made an announcement that will simplify business travel and personal tourism to Canada.

Could the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism please inform the House on the steps that we have taken to ensure that business travel and tourists will easily be able to access places like the Yukon territory from states like Alaska?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC):** First, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy with the work by my colleague from Yukon. He works very hard for his people and the economy there.

[*Translation*]

With his announcement today and the leadership of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and our government, Canadians will be able to travel freely from the United States to Canada in an American rental car without any administrative hurdles.

That is good for the Yukon and good for Canada.

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**AIR TRANSPORTATION**

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities would prefer to wash his hands of the Neuville airport instead of listening to the people. That is shameful. The municipality will now have to take its fight to the FCM because the federal government will not listen.

According to the Conservatives, there are no safety concerns at Neuville. However, a recent study indicated that children living within one kilometre of an airport have higher rates of lead poisoning.

Can the minister tell us if he thinks that the lead poisoning of our children is a safety issue?

**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 we have said previously, Transport Canada's mandate is to ensure that we have a sound economy and to promote a safe airline industry. Neuville is another matter, and since we cannot take retroactive action on Neuville, the matter is closed.

Based on the member's premise, we would have to shut down all airports across the country. We would have to shut down airports everywhere, including Vancouver and Toronto, because it is now too dangerous to fly planes. That is what she just told us. No, we will continue to properly represent Canadians.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, two years after shelving plans for drilling in the Arctic following the

disaster of BP in the Gulf of Mexico, it now appears that we are having a new oil rush for the Arctic. It is disquieting, since the National Energy Board has relaxed its requirements that would require a same-season relief well in case of blowouts.

How will the National Energy Board eliminate the risk of blowouts during drilling, exploration and development in our most fragile ecosystem, the Arctic?

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the north is home to world-class natural resources, representing tremendous economic growth and jobs potential for northerners and all Canadians. Our government continues to promote investment in northern communities. This is something that the issuance of exploration licences in the Beaufort will help to encourage.

The 2011-12 call for bids for the Beaufort Sea and Mackenzie Delta continues to reflect that potential.

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**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Rasa Jukneviene, Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania.

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

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**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will recall in question period when our member for Alfred-Pellan asked a question of the government. The member for Vancouver South heckled our member and our side a number of times in a most improper and unparliamentary way. Mr. Speaker, you may have thought that this had come from a protester in the galleries. That is understandable because the type of incendiary language used in the attack on the member of Parliament for Alfred—Pellan was inexcusable.

The Conservatives, on many occasions when there have been protests in galleries, have described themselves as feeling afraid, persecuted and unable to sit in their seats and do their work as members of Parliament. I would hope that the Conservatives would apply this same standard when a member of Parliament from their side attacks one of ours in asking a decent and reasonable question.

I can understand that the member is a certain distance from your chair, but if we tolerate this type of behaviour by members of Parliament towards other members of Parliament, there is no possibility of decorum and there is no possibility of civility in this place.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you demand from this member an apology to the House.

● (1510)

**Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I believe very firmly that parents have the responsibility for their children and what they can publicly view.

Today, I have a group of school children from my riding from Osler school, an elementary school, here visiting Parliament. To hear that they might be exposed in a children's museum, the science and technology museum—

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

This is not a matter of debate. The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has pointed out that the member for Vancouver South made a particular heckle during a question. If the member for Vancouver South wishes to address that she may, or she may leave it up to me to deal with.

Does the hon. member for Vancouver South wish to reply to the point of order?

**Ms. Wai Young:** Mr. Speaker, I will leave it up to your good auspices to determine.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are limits.

First of all, it is not a children's museum, it is the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. Second, people here have the right to ask questions. Challenging that right because someone does not have children is unacceptable. The member should apologize immediately.

[*English*]

**Ms. Wai Young:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to apologize for my words to the member opposite.

**The Speaker:** I appreciate the hon. member for Vancouver South dealing with that.

The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

#### DECORUM

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is on a different point of order. This morning between 10:30 a.m. and 11 a.m., during questions and comments on the pooled pension plan debate, I started off my speech with not a direct insult but an implied one to my colleague, the member for Burlington. Whether I agree with him or not is irrelevant. He did not deserve the implied insult that I put out there.

I would like to apologize to him and to the House for that.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment on a point of order.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am just responding to previous comments made in the House. As a female member of Parliament, I think it is important for all of us to respect appropriate language when it comes to gender in the House. I think that all parliamentarians in the House share that view, and I hope that we all work together, both sides of the House, in doing that in the future.

#### *Business of the House*

##### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on another point of order, the Minister of Canadian Heritage suggested in answer to one of the questions today that I had not visited the Museum of Science and Technology and had not seen the exhibit. I just wanted to clarify that I had and invite him to withdraw his comments.

##### DECORUM

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is not my practice to raise these particular points. Today seems to be a particularly difficult day in the House, as you observed.

On two occasions members of Parliament, from the Conservatives and the Liberals, accused other members of being stupid and ignorant. Clearly, in our orders around this place, in order to have some sort of civility in approach to debate, using such terms to refer to another hon. member of the House, whichever direction it is guided toward, is beneath contempt for a member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, you heard the comments clearly. It is in your guidance to suggest that members do not use this language when referring to another member of the House. It is very difficult, near impossible, to imagine the situation improving when members accuse others of being stupid and ignorant. I hope that you will rule on this.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I firmly share my colleague's belief that we should have decorum in the House of Commons, given that we all have responsibilities as parliamentarians to take debate seriously. I also hope that my colleague opposite would encourage some of his members who use demeaning comments like "Muskoka minister", et cetera, in their comments, and share that with caucus. We will do the same.

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I would agree with the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley that calling another member stupid would be unparliamentary. The phrase I heard was referring to the comments made by the member and criticizing the statements he made. That is as I heard it. I would not want to comment on not being able to find more appropriate words to make a point. Certainly, members might want to use their own judgment when it comes to the elevation of their debate. I certainly cannot find that referring to a member's comments and criticizing the comments in that way would fall into the same category as making a personal attack and making a personal characterization. That is as I heard it today.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley may wish to pose the Thursday question, unless he has other points to make.

\* \* \*

● (1515)

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the government.

*Government Orders*

We have now seen the government shut down debate in this House 20 times. Secretive committees in the legislature are becoming the norm. A 425-page omnibus Trojan Horse bill gutting the environment, taking \$12,000 out of the pockets of seniors and fundamentally changing how employment insurance works in this country without any consultation or mandate from Canadians is just the most recent and egregious example of their undermining of our democratic values and institution.

In addition to the schedule for the week following the constituency week, my request for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is this. Do the government members have any concerns whatsoever about how their constant and steady erosion of democratic values in this place undermines all our work, both theirs and ours?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first, arising out of questions of decorum, I am a believer that anything we do to elevate decorum here is a positive thing. I encourage him. For example, one of his members today, in a question, referred to a minister as being responsible for the department of propaganda. That is an example of what we consider to be the inappropriate kind of thing we hear from the opposition all the time.

We are very interested in seeing this Parliament function and making decisions. We have been happy to see that happening on the budget, with the longest-ever debate on a budget bill probably in Canadian history. We were happy to facilitate that through the rules. We will continue to ensure that we have broad and thorough debate here, but that we also make decisions so we avoid going down the path that others would like to go, to see us go down the path that we see Greece going down and places like the United States, where they have not had a vote in the Senate on a budget bill since April 29, 2009. We do not want to have that kind of indecision and crippling of our economy. However, we are moving forward.

[*Translation*]

The government's top priority is the economy. On Monday night, as scheduled weeks ago, the House passed Bill C-38, the Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity Act, at second reading, bringing us one step closer to balancing the budget and assuring the responsible development of our resources.

The bill, which implements economic action plan 2012, is now with the Standing Committee on Finance and a subcommittee for detailed study by those two bodies.

As a result of the extensive debate we ensured for this bill, even the deputy leader of the NDP described it yesterday in the House as "being studied more than any other budget bill."

[*English*]

Just so my friend understood this clearly, it was his own deputy leader who described the bill in the House yesterday as having been "studied more than any other budget bill". That demonstrates our commitment to full debate in this House.

This afternoon, we will continue report stage for Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act. This bill needs to become law before the end of June, so we will resume debate on the

immigration bill on Tuesday, May 29, after the House returns from its upcoming constituency week.

Tomorrow the House will have an opposition day when we will debate an NDP motion.

On Monday, May 28, the House will have third reading of Bill C-11, the copyright modernization act, which would help our creative and digital economy. After years of thorough study and debate in this chamber, the members of the other place will finally have a chance to consider this important economic legislation.

[*Translation*]

May 30 shall be the fifth allotted day, which I believe will see a Liberal motion debated. Finally, May 31 shall be the sixth allotted day, which will go to the New Democrats.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

### PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT

The House resumed consideration of 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, as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

**The Speaker:** There were three minutes remaining before question period for questions and comments following the speech by the hon. member for Saint-Lambert.

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to continue the debate on Bill C-31, the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act.

[*English*]

Canada and the government are proud of our tradition of being a country of openness to newcomers and a place of protection for refugees. Indeed, since the government came into office in 2006 we have maintained the highest sustained levels of immigration in Canadian history, admitting on average over 250,000 new permanent residents each year, and maintaining the world's strongest tradition of refugee protection.

We are increasing by some 20% the number of resettled refugees that we accept, increasing the integration support that they receive, so that Canada will receive the highest per capita number of resettled refugees in the world. Of course, we also have a generous refugee asylum determination system to ensure that foreigners who come to Canada who have a well-founded fear of persecution are not returned to face danger.



However, this bill is a necessary part of our efforts to protect the openness and generosity of our immigration and refugee protection systems against those who would seek to abuse Canada's generosity, more specifically, through commercial and dangerous human smuggling operations, fake asylum claims, large numbers of which are in our asylum system, and other efforts to subvert the integrity of our immigration system and the consistent application of its fair rules.

I would like to commend the members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on their diligent work and their many hours of hearings on Bill C-31. They heard from dozens of witnesses and diligently considered amendments to the bill.

[*Translation*]

The members who were in the House in the previous Parliament will remember that we passed Bill C-11, which set out a balanced refugee system. They will also remember that, at that time, the government and the opposition agreed to make certain amendments to the bill to ensure that it was balanced or, in other words, to make sure that the system was quick, effective and fair. At that time, we were happy with the results of that legislative effort.

However, since June 2010, there has been a huge increase in bogus refugee claims in Canada, particularly by EU nationals.

Indeed, last year, we received close to 6,000 refugee claims from EU nationals, which is more than the number of claims we receive from Africa or Asia. Almost none of these European refugee claimants attend their hearings before the Immigration and Refugee Board, and according to our fair and legal system, almost none of them are legitimate refugees.

That is one of the reasons why we need to strengthen the integrity of our system to really discourage bogus refugee claimants from coming to Canada and abusing our country's generosity. Processing these fake claims costs Canadian taxpayers approximately \$50,000. These are the objectives of Bill C-31.

Further to the statements made by members of Parliament, including opposition members, and by some witnesses who appeared before the parliamentary committee, the government considered any reasonable amendments to create a better bill that meets its objectives of combatting human smuggling more effectively, preventing bogus refugee claims and strengthening the security of our system.

• (1525)

[*English*]

Let me review briefly some of the amendments that were adopted at committee.

First, one such amendment relates to clause 19. Clause 19 provides for the automatic loss of permanent resident status if an individual loses protected person status as a result of cessation.

Cessation means that the Immigration and Refugee Board, I emphasize the IRB, not the minister, can take away someone's refugee status if it is proven that the person no longer needs protection. It has always been in IRPA, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, since it became law in 2002.

### *Government Orders*

Since we introduced Bill C-31, we have heard concerns that an improvement of the conditions in someone's country of origin could result in the automatic loss of an individual's permanent resident status by a decision of the IRB, regardless of how long they have been a permanent resident in Canada.

Some have worried that Canada was moving toward a conditional permanent residence situation for refugees, which I should point out is not unusual in other democratic countries. The United Kingdom and Germany, for example, do not grant immediate permanent residency for protected people. However, this was never the intention of the bill.

To clarify our intentions, we moved an amendment at committee that one automatic cessation ground be removed from clause 19. The cessation ground we are removing reads as follows:

the reasons for which the person sought refugee status have ceased to exist.

The effect of this amendment is that cessation for these reasons, such as a change in country conditions, would not result in automatic loss of permanent residency. This would ensure that permanent resident status is lost automatically only when the cessation decision of the IRB is the result of the individual's own actions.

For example, if people come to Canada, make an asylum claim that is accepted by the IRB, but shortly after receiving such status, they return to live in the country of origin, which they allegedly fled due to fear of persecution, we would reserve the right under IRPA to go before the IRB to say that it appears they never needed our protection because they have immediately re-availed themselves of their country of origin. Therefore we could commence proceedings of the IRB to seek an order to cease their protected person status and revoke their permanent residency, but that would only be if they have done something to demonstrate essentially that they defrauded our asylum system.

The government also moved an amendment that relates to pre-removal risk assessments, also known as PRRAs. When failed refugee claimants are given removal orders from Canada, they can under certain conditions apply for a PRRR, which would trigger a review to make certain that the failed claimants are not being removed into situations where they might face a risk of persecution, torture, cruel and unusual punishment or loss of life.

[*Translation*]

In its original form, Bill C-31 called for a one-year ban for failed refugee claimants, including those from countries that generally do not produce refugees, which I might add, is a phrase used by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

This measure was intended to simplify the refugee system, eliminate duplication and expedite the removal of failed refugee claimants. The government proposed an amendment that extended this ban to three years for failed refugee claimants from countries that generally do not produce refugees.

*Government Orders**[English]*

The extension of the bar for these claimants is aimed at addressing existing process vulnerabilities that lead to misuse by those who are not in need of protection. It would facilitate the removals of those individuals not in need of Canada's protection, without the requirement to conduct a redundant second risk assessment.

Since the extension of the bar on PRRA would apply only to failed claimants from countries known to not normally produce refugees and generally considered safe, which countries, by the way, based on our proposed guidelines, would see at least three-quarters of asylum claims being rejected, abandoned or withdrawn, there is already a minimal likelihood of returning someone to a situation of risk.

It should also be noted that each eligible claimant would have received a hearing on the merits of his or her case before an independent decision-maker at the quasi-judicial IRB, which decision-maker would have rejected the claim and found no risk in returning the claimant.

In addition, the legislation would provide the minister with the ability to exempt someone from the bar on PRRA, either the one-year bar for most failed claimants or the three-year bar on PRRA for failed claimants from designated countries. That is to say, for example, that if there were to be a major event, say, a coup d'état or civil war in a country, the minister could exempt failed claimants from that country from the PRRA bar, allowing them to in fact apply for and receive a second risk assessment. It is also important to note that this amendment does not preclude a failed refugee claimant from continuing to seek leave to the Federal Court for judicial review of a negative decision of the refugee protection division of the IRB.

Some of the measures in Bill C-31 that received the most feedback from parliamentarians and members of the public were those that concerned the mandatory detention of foreign nationals who arrive in Canada as part of a designated irregular arrival, which effectively would be a large-scale human smuggling voyage. These measures, of course, were part of the section of the bill designed to deal with human smuggling.

This amendment would allow for a detention review by the immigration division of the IRB on the detention of a smuggled migrant in a designated arrival initially at 14 days prior to the detention and then subsequently at 6 months, rather than the 12 months that had originally been proposed in the bill.

● (1530)

*[Translation]*

I would like to once again thank all the members for their important work in committee. I am eager for all the amendments to be accepted here in the House.

*[English]*

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as we have stated earlier, this piece of legislation actually creates in Canada, for the first time, two tiers of refugees and asylum seekers. One of the areas that still puzzles me, which is something New Democrats asked for in committee and were told it would be in regulations, is that when we vote on this legislation there are no

criteria used to stipulate how an irregular arrival would be designated. That is the first part of my question.

The second part of the question is on the fact that this bill would actually deprive those who are labelled irregular arrivals from applying for permanent residence and, therefore, reunification with their families for five years. That includes children. Why is the government, time and time again, blocking family reunification?

**Hon. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I have to point out that the official opposition, which on immigration matters is led by the member opposite, has proposed to delete every section of the bill, demonstrating, I submit, that it does not even pretend to take seriously the problems of human smuggling and the large numbers of fake asylum claims that are massively burdening our system, which must be addressed.

Canadians expect Parliament to act to deter human smugglers from targeting this country and treating it like a doormat. The single most important provision in the bill to deter human smugglers is the five-year bar on permanent residency for smuggled migrants who get a positive protection decision at the IRB.

I beg the member to understand the rationale. There is a black market for human smugglers. As long as people are willing to pay a certain price, there will be smugglers willing to bring them to Canada through this dangerous means of smuggling. We must change the business model. We must change the economics of the smuggling syndicates.

The only way we can effectively do that is to convey to potential smuggling clients that they will not be able to bring to Canada several members of their family who will help them to pay off their debt to the smuggling syndicate. That is why we proposed a five-year bar, so that those potential clients will not commit to paying \$45,000 or \$50,000 to these large and sophisticated syndicates.

This is the only and most effective provision to really seriously suppress the market for the clients of smuggling syndicates wanting to come to Canada.

● (1535)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question will be fairly specific. It is in regard to the minister's ability to indicate to a grouping of two or more that those individuals would be deemed an irregular arrival.

By that designation, they would be subjected to detention. They would have to try to prove their identity within fourteen days and, if they did not do that, then they would be in mandatory detention for at least another six months. I acknowledge that the government did give some leeway on the one-year mandatory detention, and that is a good thing. Obviously it did not go far enough.

*Government Orders*

Surely to goodness the minister realizes he is going to divide a parent from a child in some situations. In the long run that is not healthy for both parent and child. The long-term cost of doing that could be great, not only socially but economically.

How would the minister respond to that, which is a concern that was raised on numerous occasions in the committee?

**Hon. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I think the opposition misses the entire point.

The whole point is that parents should not be packing children onto a rusty boat that has been commandeered by a bunch of criminals to drag them across the Pacific Ocean at extreme risk in a smuggling operation, when we know that smuggling operations result in the death of thousands of people around the world every year.

The whole point is to send a message to such clients that they should not sign on the dotted line with the smuggling syndicate. If they want to come to Canada, they should make an application for immigration and come like everyone else. They should not come illegally. They should not come through the dangerous profiteering of a smuggling syndicate.

That is exactly the message that this bill seeks to send. I hope it is received for precisely that reason. If people are in a region of the world where they need refugee protection, they should go within their region to seek protection from the UN or another country. They should not pass through three transit countries and then bypass forty others in order to come to Canada in the most dangerous and illegal way possible.

Yes, this is designed to crack down on the clients of human smuggling, and that is the point of the bill. We have not heard a single alternative from the opposition about how to effectively do that.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on this bill really on behalf of my riding of Parkdale—High Park, an urban riding in the west end of Toronto and home to communities that have come together from many different countries. There are people who came, like my grandparents, from the U.K. There are people who have come from Asia, from Africa, from the U.S., from Europe, from all over, in waves of different immigrants.

Some, like my family, came with not much more than their ability to work hard and their desire to make a better life for themselves and their families. People who were able to immigrate to this great country have seen their families go on to make a contribution that was beyond their imagination at that time.

We see others who have come under real duress, people who have come as refugees generations ago and more recently. For example, in my riding of Parkdale—High Park we have the largest Tibetan community in Canada. These are people who sought refuge, sometimes decades ago, from the Tibetan region of China and who had been living in the refugee areas in Nepal or India. We have people who came from Africa and from all parts of the world.

Some of the stories they tell are harrowing. The stories are of people who are trying to escape from extreme conditions, from a

lack of political or religious rights and sometimes from very harrowing physical conditions.

My community also happens to be home to many new refugees from the Roma community. We have a large Roma community in our area. I have met many members of the community. I have heard many stories, and I want to express the great concern that not just that community but others in our city and across the country have expressed about these changes that are being proposed and brought before the House.

Certainly there is concern that the bill takes an approach of punishing refugees rather than of looking to assist them and help them in their hour of greatest need and that the issue of human smuggling can already be adequately dealt with under existing legislation.

We have heard from many who have said that this same party, while in a minority government, just passed a balanced refugee reform bill last year. It has just been passed, it has not even been fully implemented, and now the compromise that was worked out with all parties and passed by the House is going to be thrown out in favour of the provisions in this legislation. Once again the government, as it is wont to do now that it has a majority, is ramming this legislation through in a way that is especially troubling for those who perhaps do not share the perspective of the government and really want to have a very full airing of the provisions in the bill.

I have also heard great concern about the fact that the bill would concentrate power in the hands of the minister in terms of being able to treat refugees differently based on how they come to Canada. There is concern about what that means in terms of equality before the law.

The minister and I have attended many different community events together in our area, and I know that he tries to get to know newcomer communities well. They appreciate that, but I do not know how well he knows the Roma community. I have heard him say a lot about it, but I will read a letter from one member of the community who is now a landed immigrant in Canada.

● (1540)

He says:

My name is Robi Botos. I'm a Roma musician and composer. I came to Canada in 1998 from Budapest, Hungary. I saw the growing persecution and racism in the 90s. With the support of the Canadian music scene, fans and friends I was able to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Hungary did not become a safer country since I left. In fact, it became much worse. Today, if you are a Roma living in Hungary, your life is clearly in danger from the growing fascist movement. There are many evidences of that. All you need to do is, just go on the internet and see for yourself.

I have done more than that. I have talked to many community members in our area.

He goes on:

I fell in love with Canada, because I saw that people don't discriminate against me, and they support me for who I am.

I won two of the biggest piano competitions in the world as a Canadian Roma artist. I got many awards as a Canadian Roma musician, including the National Jazz Award, and recent Juno nominations. They announce me as a Canadian national treasure. I shared the stage with my biggest hero, the great Canadian legend Oscar Peterson.

### *Government Orders*

I say this, because just a few years back, I was at the edge of being deported, and if Bill C-31 would have been in effect, and I had to go back to Hungary, my son could've been the boy who they shot 18 times because he was a Roma.

I did not come to Canada to take advantage of the Canadian Welfare system, or be a criminal! Like most Roma refugees I sold everything I ever had to be able to buy air plane tickets, knowing I'll lose it all if I have to go back. I came here with no English skills, and no guarantees.

I'm deeply disappointed about the Canadian Immigration discriminating against Roma refugees, by referring to them as "bogus refugees" and that they're even considering calling Hungary a safe country for the Roma people. That's not the Canadian way. They should at least research first!

I dream, that the Canadian Immigration will act Canadian by protecting Roma refugees and not threaten them, by sending them back where their life is in great danger.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my people.

I am concerned first of all that here in Canada there have been comments made about the Roma community that impugn their reputation. I have met many people face to face, know them, hear their stories and know of the contribution they make to our community. I know about the insecurity and fear they feel about losing the opportunity to be here in safety and going back to persecution.

I am concerned that our government made changes to the immigration and refugee legislation just a year ago and today is throwing those changes out and introducing changes that would create two tiers of refugees and deny people who are seeking safety here the opportunity to remain in Canada.

I have done a lot of work with organizations such as the Canadian Council for Refugees, which is calling for this bill to be completely scrapped. The Canadian Bar Association is concerned that it violates charter protections against arbitrary detention. The Civil Liberties Association has also been very critical and is calling the measures contemplated "draconian".

I am speaking out on behalf of people I have seen face to face, families who come here with very little and who have had terrible experiences of discrimination and, in some cases, violence. They see Canada as a refuge. I would hate to think that with our reputation for human rights and for respecting international agreements around the world, we would somehow turn our backs on people in their hour of need.

• (1545)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for participating in the debate. I think she is misinformed in a number of respects, one of which is the suggestion that Roma asylum claimants are not being fairly considered by our refugee system. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Under the current system and the system proposed by Bill C-38, claimants from whatever country of origin, ethnicity or cultural or racial background will all have the same access to the same fair and independent quasi-judicial process on the merits of their claim before an independent decision-maker of the quasi-judicial IRB in a manner that is consistent with natural justice and due process and that exceeds the requirements of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the 1951 refugee convention.

The member raises the notion that somehow there is a negative prejudice associated with asylum claims from European Roma. I

have certainly done nothing to suggest such a negative prejudice. However, what I have done is comment on the objective mathematical fact that since we granted visa exemptions for several European countries in 2007 and 2008, some 95% of the European asylum claimants have not shown up for their own refugee hearing at the IRB and have abandoned or withdrawn their own claims. Of the tiny fraction that went to adjudication, only a tiny fraction of those were deemed to actually be well-founded asylum claims.

Is the member not concerned to see such a large wave of demonstrably unfounded asylum claimants in our system, not based on my opinion but on the actions of the claimants themselves?

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the minister this: why is it that a year ago more than 100 Roma refugees from Hungary or from the Czech Republic would have been accepted here as refugees, and now, under this legislation, if these countries are designated as safe countries, these refugees would not be accepted? A year ago they would have been refugees, but under this safe country designation, they would no longer be refugees. What has changed?

From what I hear from the Roma community, conditions are worse, not better. Therefore, why would we allow them to be put at risk?

• (1550)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to the issue of mandatory detention and then alluded to the current system. What I have been saying for quite a while now is that we, meaning the immigration and citizenship committee, have been told that the current system of detention was actually working quite well. It was proven to be effective. It was holding people in detention for as long as was necessary to alleviate both public security and health concerns.

It raises the question of why the government would change something that appeared to be working quite well. It had nothing to do with the processing times that all parties are concerned about and everything to do with how to detain someone. That system seemed to work, so why would the government want to make that change at this time? What does the member suspect is the motivator?

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to speculate as to the government's motivation for bringing in this change. However, I do share his concern that children, for example, could be detained under this legislation. I do not think that is right or appropriate.

I also share his concern that just a year ago, all parties agreed on changes to the immigration and refugee legislation. There was a balanced approach, and while no one felt it was perfect, there was compromise. There has not even been time for that legislation to be fully implemented and for us to see the outcome of that legislation, and now the minister wants to sweep aside that compromise and bring in these changes, which is troubling to many of those who are directly affected.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act.

Before I get into the bill, I want to give a little background about the riding I represent and the people who make up the wonderful riding of Richmond Hill in Ontario. Richmond Hill is nestled in the heart of the GTA. It is one of the most diverse communities in the country—consisting of Canadian citizens, landed immigrants and people aspiring to become citizens who come from virtually every nation in the world. In fact, in the greater Toronto area in which I reside, over 150 dialects are spoken on a daily basis. I am very much in touch with the needs of the multicultural community and what it means to come to Canada for a better life for themselves and their families and to take advantage of the opportunities that are available in this wonderful nation in which we live.

I feel compelled to voice in the House what I hear from the people who reside in the great riding of Richmond Hill with respect to Bill C-31. I am hoping that, in the short time that I have, I will be able to properly articulate their views on this legislation, since a large percentage of the people who reside in my riding were immigrants to this country at one time or another.

We have heard opposition members state their position. There are a few things that need to be again highlighted to bring the subject into proper focus. I think we all agree in the House, and certainly Canadians agree across this nation, that Canada has the most fair and generous immigration system in the world. However, Canadians have no tolerance for people who abuse our generosity. It is a responsibility of parliamentarians and certainly the government to take the proper measures to crack down on those who abuse that generosity. The protecting Canada's immigration system act would make our refugee system faster and fairer.

I will provide a plain statistic. Processing an application today of a refugee claimant in our country takes an average of 1,038 days. That would be reduced to 45 days for those who are claiming refuge in Canada from designated countries and 216 days for those from other countries around the world. Imagine someone who is persecuted, whose life is threatened and has been tortured, comes to Canada for a better life and is tied up in a system for 1,038 days while bogus claimants are clogging up the system? Imagine people coming here for a better life and waiting the better part of three years for their application to be decided on before they can start contributing to Canada as a viable new immigrant to this country. The measures in Bill C-31 would ensure that the people who need it the most get into the country a lot faster. That, I submit, is a very compassionate approach to refugee reform.

I applaud the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism for the courage he has shown in spearheading this through. That is what members are hearing in their ridings and it is certainly what I am hearing in my riding, that we need to be compassionate and look after those in need. If we clog them up in the system after they have come to this country and they do not know what is happening or what will happen for the next two and a half to three years, that is not showing compassion.

•(1555)

Unfortunately, human smuggling is a very lucrative business, and there are those who engage in that disgraceful act of preying on those in need for financial profit. We need to crack down on those people because, in my opinion, and I believe in the opinion of every member in this House, there is no place in Canada for human smugglers to prosper. We should close every possible loophole we have to eliminate that possibility from happening.

We have a responsibility as a government, and that responsibility is predicated upon the fact that Canadians expect us to ensure that those people who are welcomed into our country are properly identified so that we know who is going to walk the streets beside our families, live in our communities and work with us in our place of employment.

This bill would provide for a significant investment in the identification of people, and that is the concept of biometrics. Biometrics is a 21st century identification tool that we have heard is very much a positive step for us take. We have heard it from law enforcement agencies across this country, including the RCMP, the CBSA and CSIS.

It makes sense to Canadians, and it should make sense to all of us that we know the identity of individuals before we allow them to walk on our soil in, before they walk beside our families, before they work in our communities and before they shop where we shop. We need to know their identity. Biometrics is a method that will help us to more quickly identify people who want to come into our country. It is something that should be applauded by all members in this House. I do not think anyone would want people here who have perpetrated a war crime, who are a security risk in their own country, who have done prison time or who are criminals who came over here on a ship and have thrown their records into the water so they cannot be identified when they arrive.

I cannot imagine any Canadian saying that we should let people into our country without identifying them, that they have said that they are refugees and we should believe them.

It is a responsibility of our government to ensure that we look after the safety and security of Canadians first. It is also our responsibility to ensure that our good nature is not taken advantage of by those who come here claiming they are refugees, take the benefits and then shortly thereafter leave. It does not make sense. It boggles the mind that 95%, if not more, of applicants from the European Union either abandon, withdraw their claim or the refugee board deems them inappropriate or inadmissible to Canada.

Those people tie up the system, and that is at a cost of about \$170 million per year to the Canadian taxpayer. I think it is critically important for us to ensure that people who claim to be refugees or claim that they being persecuted in a European Union country are a legitimate refugees. It is important for all of us to realize that the European Union is a union of 27 democratically elected nations. The first choice that someone who feels they are being persecuted would have would be one of the other 26 countries before they would come to Canada. That would only makes sense. They are democratically elected nations.

*Government Orders*

In closing, I will quote what some others have said. In an article in the *Edmonton Journal* dated February 17, 2012, it states:

Good moves on refugees.

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.

A *Toronto Star* editorial from February 21, 2012, reads:

...[the Minister of Immigration]'s latest reform plan would reduce the current backlog of 42,000 refugee claims; cut the processing time for asylum seekers from "safe countries" to 45 days...and save money.

Ian Capstick, MediaStyle NDP commentator on CBC's *Power and Politics*, as early as February 16, 2012, stated, "Obviously there are certain countries like the United States of America, for instance, in which...we should accept no refugees from".

•(1600)

I would ask all of the members of the House to consider the importance of this legislation and vote for it as quickly as possible for the betterment of Canada.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it was very pleasant working with my colleague on the committee, even though he did make a mistake and did not vote for any of the amendments I proposed.

I want to set the record straight about people within the European Union. People within the European Union do have mobility. They can go into another state and look for a job. However, my understanding from the witnesses we heard is that they have 90 days within which to find work or they have to move on. However, under the agreement reached by the EU, they cannot, while they are there, claim asylum on humanitarian or compassionate grounds. That was the information that was shared with us by the representative from the EU.

If there is not the potential for, let us say, a Roma to leave Czechoslovakia and go to France and be able to claim asylum, why would we keep using that argument over and over again?

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the good work she did on the committee. As much as I like her on a personal level, I could not find myself voting on any of those amendments as they were in contradiction to what it is we are trying to accomplish here, which is to make a faster, fairer refugee system that will allow legitimate people into the country a lot faster.

In response to the question, the minister has been very clear and he has only commented on trends of asylum claim finalizations. Virtually all asylum claims from the European Union have been withdrawn or abandoned by the claimants themselves, or rejected by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board, indicating that these claimants have not been in need of Canada's protection. In the vast majority of cases, these decisions have been made by the claimants themselves through abandonment and withdrawal. The point is that over 95% of these claims are bogus claims, and we need to wake up to that fact.

•(1605)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the efforts that the member made in committee. I enjoyed listening to his questions. I thought they were good questions, well put and so forth.

I want to ask a different type of question that I have asked other members, and that is with regard to the safe country list. The member was at committee listening to all the presenters. I think he recognizes that Canada does need to establish a safe country list. All political parties support that, or at least the three main political parties support having a safe country list. Where we differ in our opinions is on the manner by which countries are placed onto that list.

Can the member recall anything in committee where the suggestion would have been made or implied that it would be better to have the minister determine what is a safe country, versus an advisory group or a panel? I thought an advisory group or a panel would have been better than having the minister himself do it. I think an amendment to re-establish what was previously agreed to would be well received if, in fact, that amendment were put here in the House or even possibly in the Senate.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the good work he does on the committee. I found his voice to be a voice of reason and understanding. He spoke in favour of many of the positive points of Bill C-31 on repeated occasions.

In fact, let me quote him. The Liberal immigration critic, the hon. member of Parliament for Winnipeg North, was quoted in the March 30 edition of the *Vancouver Courier*, as saying, "In principle I support the need to make quick decisions in regards to refugees". That is a telltale signal of how he feels about the legislation.

However, I will quote somebody else I know he feels very close to, although I do not. This is what that person had to say: "I want a legitimate, lawful refugee system that, to get to the openness point, welcomes genuine refugees". He 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" and "otherwise we'll have refugee fraud, and nobody wants that". That was in the Saint John Board of Trade on August 13, 2009, from none other than the former leader of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand today to add my voice in opposition to this legislation, the anti-refugee bill, and in support of the NDP amendments.

As New Democrats, we oppose the bill because we will not support the punishment of asylum seekers, and that is exactly what the bill would do.

We also believe the Conservative government should change the title of the bill to "the punishing refugees act". The title of the bill should reflect the nature of its content. If we are to be honest with Canadians, we need to tell them what the minister is doing and the true direction we are headed under the government.

Canadians are proud of our country's tradition of providing protection for those in need. With the passing of Bill C-31, the Conservative government will effectively be killing this tradition.

*Government Orders*

For over two weeks, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration heard from witnesses who spoke on the content of Bill C-31. Witness after witness told us this legislation was fundamentally flawed, unconstitutional and concentrated too much power in the hands of one minister.

The well-informed opinion of these witnesses should not be taken lightly. We are talking about witnesses representing Amnesty International, the Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canada Research Chair in Global Migration Studies and front-line workers who provide legal, medical and psychological support to people who have fled persecution. These are experts in this field. They know far more about this topic than many in this room. Therefore, their testimony should be taken seriously and simply not ignored, which is exactly what the government is currently doing.

As I stand in the House, a key component of our highly respected democracy, with plush carpets and clean water, food to eat, peace in our country, I am reminded that elsewhere in the country and around the world people are not so lucky.

Right now, at this very moment, people are being persecuted, are experiencing discrimination, are living through conflict, public unrest and general instability, and some are forced to make the decision to flee the only home they have ever known, fleeing for their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

People flee their country because they are desperate and they have no other option if they want to ensure the safety of their families. However, with the passing of Bill C-31, if they come to our country as asylum seekers, much like my father did, depending on their means of arrival and undefined number of people they arrive with, instead of being treated like human beings they will be treated like criminals, treated as guilty until proven innocent. We all know that is not the Canadian standard.

The bill would punish victims of persecution and victims of human smuggling. It would punish those who, because of a lack of money or option, would do whatever it takes to keep their families safe. I ask my colleagues in the House to empathize and put themselves in their situation. I ask them to think for a moment of what they would do to keep their partner, their children, their mother, their grandmother safe. If they needed to, would they run, flee the country that was unsafe through any means?

The Conservatives refuse to accept that our system currently works. We already capture the real criminals and deport them. The sentence for human smuggling is already the most punitive it can be in our country, life in prison and a fine of \$1 million, yet we continuously hear members opposite saying that we need to take away the rights of victim in order to catch the human smugglers. The bill would do nothing to catch human smugglers. It would punish refugees and refugee claimants and not the human smugglers.

Instead of targeting the illegal smuggling rings, the Conservatives would rather arbitrarily designate some refugees as "irregular arrivals" and incarcerate all of them. Now, upon arrival, designated refugees will be held in provincial jails, handcuffed and treated like prisoners, with minimal review.

New Democrats are opposed to the measures in the bill precisely because Canada will now be known for punishing the most vulnerable and traumatized people in the world.

My constituents are concerned. Some of the refugees who were on the MV *Sun Sea* and *Ocean Lady* live in my riding of Scarborough-Rouge River. They have been given refugee protection by our government. They are making a home in our neighbourhoods, contributing to our economy and giving back to our community.

As the designated foreign national category is retroactive to 2009, these valuable members of our community who came on these two migrant vessels, along with future so-called irregular arrivals, will now be treated as second-class citizens under the new two-tier refugee treatment system that will be created.

● (1610)

Under the bill they, and all so-called designated refugees, would be barred from applying for permanent residence for five years. This is different from all other refugees, who are allowed to apply for permanent residency immediately. The bar would prevent families from reuniting for five years and further as they went through the already lengthy sponsorship system.

We are separating children from their parents. If fathers or mothers flee their country to make way for their children, they would now be separated from their families for a minimum of at least seven years. Children who are 13 will be young adults by the time they would see their mother and father again. Formative years of their life will be lived spent away from their parents.

Further, by the time their parents would be eligible to actually sponsor them, the children may not qualify as dependents anymore, meaning that they will now be forced to live permanently separated from their parents and parents separated from their children.

We could have made the bill better. New Democrats proposed concrete changes to the bill. It was a disappointment to the witnesses, the stakeholders and all involved when all of these good propositions that would have provided improvements to the bill were opposed by the government time and time again.

While baby steps were taken, none of the NDP's substantive amendments were adopted by the government members in the committee.

New Democrats have a better solution to our refugee and immigration system. In fact, just last year, all parties compromised to pass Bill C-11, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act. That bill was applauded by our current Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Bill C-31, however, ignores these compromises and includes all of the worst parts of the former Bill C-11.

What is worse is that Bill C-31 will pass before we will even have the chance to see the outcome of the changes included in Bill C-31. The government has not even allowed for the changes to take place.

*Government Orders*

One of the most troublesome measures that the Conservatives refused to revise is impossibly tight timelines for submitting an application to the Immigration and Refugee Board. The refugee system is being set up to fail. The asylum seekers are being set up to fail.

Witness after witness, including the Conservatives' own witnesses, said that these timelines were too short, that they would create incomplete and inaccurate applications. On top of that, some refugees would be refused the right to appeal their application.

We all know, unfortunately, that mistakes can be made at the IRB. The board is not perfect. With cuts to its budget and limited resources to hire adjudicators, the likelihood that mistakes will occur would be even greater. New information could come to light after an expedited claim is mistakenly processed. Without access to an appeal, this information may never be heard.

The consequences of these decisions could truly mean life or death.

Banning access to an appeal for some claimants undermines the international obligations to refugees.

A further dangerous consequence of the bill is that the power to designate a country as safe for all is concentrated solely in the hands of the minister. No country is truly safe. A country that may be safe for some residents may be unsafe for other residents.

Impartiality toward the development and maintenance of this list is extremely important. It is confusing why Bill C-31 would remove the safeguard of having a panel of experts maintain and review this list, as was decreed in Bill C-11 .

We have earned a gold standard on how we treat refugees fleeing persecution in the world. The current government is tarnishing our earned reputation. The Conservatives' changes to the refugee and immigration system will erode Canada's humanitarian reputation around the world.

I cannot support the bill and the move to a discriminatory refugee and immigration system. I cannot support the punishment of asylum seekers and refugees. That is why I oppose the bill and support the amendments put forward by the NDP.

The government needs to abandon the legislation and go back to the drawing board.

•(1615)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that counts as one of the least helpful, misinformed and frankly arrogant speeches I have heard out of dozens offered in this place over the course of two Parliaments on the issue of asylum reform.

When I say arrogance I mean, for example, that the member speaks about ignoring the witnesses because she only seems to give any plausibility to the witnesses of the ideological left who agree with her position. She gives no credence whatsoever to the many witnesses who testified in favour of this bill and its many provisions.

There are two things I find most disturbing, though, about that speech.

The first is her hyperbolic and demagogic rhetoric suggesting that this bill represents a killing of our tradition of refugee protection. Will she not recognize that the government is actually increasing by 20% the number of resettled refugees we accept, so we would be the largest recipient of resettled refugees per capita in the world? Does she characterize that as killing our tradition? Will she not recognize that these reforms would create for the first time ever a full fact-based appeal, which has never before existed in our system, which would benefit the vast majority of failed asylum claimants? Does she think that is killing our tradition of refugee protection?

The second is this. What does she propose to do to stop human smugglers from targeting Canada? She has not said a single word that would be a constructive idea to deter people from committing to pay \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year to a bunch of gangsters to come to Canada illegally and dangerously. Is her idea to do nothing?

•(1620)

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Speaker, I will repeat some of what I mentioned in my speech.

Witness after witness, including Conservative witnesses, spoke of the unconstitutionality of the bill and the impossible timelines that are being set out in the bill. Yet the minister seems to have not heard the government's own Conservative witnesses either, apparently, because when amendments were proposed in the committee, they fell on deaf ears. The Conservative members voted against them time and time again, even when the Conservatives own witnesses were being quoted in support of the amendments and against the timelines. Apparently I only hear the NDP witnesses, when we really did take into account all the witness statements that were presented to the committee.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, would the member be able to provide some comment in regard to the two ships, the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady*, both of which landed on our shores a couple of years back? If this particular bill is passed, and we anticipate that it will be because there is a majority government, it would give the minister of immigration the power to retroactively classify those individuals who came to Canada on those two ships as irregulars, which would have a fairly significant impact on their future.

Would the member provide any comment with respect to the retroactivity of this particular bill?

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North for the question and the work he has done on the citizenship and immigration committee.

With respect to the retroactive nature of the minister's right to designate people as irregular arrivals, the fact that it specifically goes back to 2009 is odd. However, it is understandable based on the minister's comments in the last Parliament when he said that the anti-refugee bill he introduced then was specifically targeted because of the Tamil migrants who came to Canada by the *Ocean Lady* and the migrant vessel *Sun Sea* and that he needed to stop migrants from arriving in Canada in this fashion.



*Government Orders*

My people, the Tamil people, were fleeing persecution when they threw themselves onto a rickety cargo boat and held their lives in their hands for two months. We know that one man actually perished on the voyage over on the *MV Sun Sea*. They are now contributing to our economy and communities in Canada. The fact that this bill would give the minister the ability to now designate them as irregular arrivals and send them back to persecution is absolutely wrong. That is all I can say.

**Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act and at report stage.

The amendments put forward by the opposition speak volumes about the real agenda in this place. When in front of the cameras, the NDP and Liberals claim they want to make Parliament work, but when the media is gone, their actions prove to be the complete opposite.

Our government listened closely to the thoughtful testimony given by each of the dozens of witnesses who appeared at our committee. We have also said that our government's focus is on passing a bill that is as strong and effective as possible.

Accordingly, we agreed to reasonable amendments that furthered the goals and principles of this bill. Even the NDP immigration critic praised our government at committee for its willingness to make this bill even better. Unfortunately, with these report stage amendments, the opposition NDP and Liberals have shown yet again that they refuse to do anything other than continue to be blindly partisan and that they are not here to work together on a better piece of legislation that is in the best interests of all Canadians and most importantly in the best interest of genuine refugees who truly are in need of Canada's protection.

Let me explain to this House and to Canadians the consequences of these amendments put forth by the opposition if they were to be adopted and if the bill were to be completely gutted.

Canada's asylum system is internationally renowned for its fairness. Not only does it respect our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the UN convention on refugees; it actually exceeds both. Indeed, Canada is one of the largest recipients of asylum claims, even though we are isolated geographically compared to most other countries. Many people come here great distances from around the globe to seek asylum here.

Consistently, the independent Immigration and Refugee Board, IRB, has delivered rulings that show that the majority of claims overall are unfounded. In 2011, 62% of all claims were either rejected by the IRB of Canada or abandoned or withdrawn by the claimants themselves.

To focus on one particular area, there were more than 5,800 new refugee claims from European Union nationals last year. Shockingly, this is more than we receive from countries like Africa or Asia. Not only that, but virtually all the claims from the European Union are withdrawn or abandoned by the claimants themselves or rejected by the independent IRB. In fact, 95% fit this category.

If the current rate of rejected, abandoned and withdrawn claims continues, it will come at a cost to the taxpayer. Last year, the cost to

Canadian taxpayers for the unfounded claims was nearly \$170 million. We believe that the reason we see so many of these rejected claimants travel so far to seek asylum here is that the current system invites them to do so. It is like a pull factor. The ability to quickly access our generous taxpayer-funded social and health benefits is definitely the pull factor for some of these people. It has become quite clear that our current refugee system is ripe for abuse.

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. Through Bill C-31, we intend to strike the right balance with our refugee system in order to deter abuse of our country's generosity and the generosity of Canadian taxpayers like those in my riding of Scarborough Centre.

We also wish to discourage the horrible crime of human smuggling by building on existing criminal prohibitions that target human smugglers. Bill C-31 would make it easier to prosecute these cases and would provide for mandatory minimum periods of imprisonment for those convicted of this serious crime.

There is no doubt that Canada has become a target for the highly lucrative and lethal practice of human smuggling. The recent tragic loss of life involving a sailboat with four nationals aboard, which ran into trouble off the coast of Nova Scotia leaving one man dead and three sailors lost at sea, is a prime example of the danger that irregular travel to Canada can create.

The government had no way of knowing that these people were coming, and since this vessel was not registered, it is quite clear that something irregular was going on. This is a matter of great concern to our government, but it should also concern all Canadians. Tragically, the end result of this perilous voyage was disastrous for all those involved.

This crime threatens both Canada's security and the lives of many desperate people who seek the services of smugglers from around the world. The government, therefore, has both a legal and a moral obligation to put an end to these criminal operations.

• (1625)

Given all these factors, it is imperative that we find a way to deter abuse of our immigration and refugee system. Bill C-31 would allow us to do just that.

First we must try to reduce the pull factors that entice disingenuous claimants from coming to Canada. Under the current asylum system, long wait times make Canada a much more attractive target for those who wish to game the system. While they wait for their claims to be processed, failed claimants can work in Canada and have access to our generous social support systems, like welfare in my province of Ontario.

*Government Orders*

Designated countries of origin are countries that do not generally produce refugees. Claimants from those countries would still get a fair and independent hearing, but they would be processed in about 45 days, compared to 1,038 days under the current system. The bill would also further streamline the process by limiting access to appeals for groups, such as those with manifestly unfounded claims, or claims with no credible basis. We would also prevent refugee claimants from submitting a claim at the same time as they apply for humanitarian and compassionate consideration. Following a negative decision from the IRB, Bill C-31 would also bar claimants from submitting the humanitarian and compassionate applications for one year.

In order to have an effective immigration system we need faster decisions, which must be complemented by timely removals. An expanded assisted voluntary returns and reintegration program would help failed refugee claimants leave Canada more quickly and voluntarily and would help them make a fresh start in their home countries.

With regard to human smuggling, the legislation would deter human smugglers from targeting Canada with their dangerous voyages. Bill C-31 would make it easier to prosecute human smugglers and would also strengthen the criminal law's response to human smuggling. The bill would make ship owners and operators accountable for use of their ships in human smuggling operations, and it would introduce stiffer penalties and fines, including mandatory minimum prison sentences, for those convicted of human smuggling.

With the passage of Bill C-31, the government would continue to honour the values Canadians hold dear by ensuring that our asylum system remains fair to those who truly need our protection. By discouraging and reducing abuse of our refugee system, we would be able to direct more of our resources to those refugees who actually need them.

We believe these measures are necessary and we believe these measures are fair. We believe that Bill C-31 lives up to its title and, if passed, would indeed protect Canada's immigration system so that it would serve Canadians. Unfortunately, if the opposition amendments were adopted, the entire bill would be gutted and we would not be able to improve our refugee determination system. If the opposition NDP and Liberals got their way, genuine refugees fleeing persecution, death and torture would have to wait longer to receive Canada's much-needed protection. Hard-working Canadian taxpayers, like those in my constituency of Scarborough Centre, would continue to be forced to foot the bill for bogus claimants who are here for the sole reason of soaking up taxpayer-funded health care and welfare benefits.

It is for these reasons that I urge my colleagues to vote against these irresponsible and shameful amendments, amendments that are a detriment to genuine refugees and all of the hard-working Canadian taxpayers in our great country.

• (1630)

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said by the government, in particular about this problem of 95% of the refugee claimants from European countries not bothering to come for their hearings. That is what Bill C-11, in the

previous Parliament, was supposed to fix, and will fix as of June of this year.

With the exception of giving the minister the power to determine which countries are safe, why are we in a rush to do what will actually be fixed if we just let the law we passed some time ago take place? What is so urgent, when we have a law coming into place to do exactly what the government says this bill was supposed to do?

**Ms. Roxanne James:** Mr. Speaker, with regard to our refugee system and those who are seeking to come to Canada, that is not a static issue.

I will quote some figures, and I am going to speak specifically of Hungary. The number of refugee claims from Hungary alone in 2011 was 4,400. That was almost fifty percent more from the previous year, in 2010, when it was only 2,300. Obviously the number of asylum claims coming into Canada does not remain the same. I hope the hon. member across the way can recognize that.

This allows me the opportunity to speak to a previous comment that was made by the member for Parkdale—High Park. She was specifically talking about a group of 100 Roma who had come to Canada last year and were accepted as refugees.

I want to clearly stipulate that I quoted the number 4,400 for last year. If the 100 Roma the member was talking about were legitimate refugees, they would also have the opportunity to be heard under the new system and they would have gained access to Canada.

• (1635)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I remember in committee that this member, more than anyone else, had a focus on the issue of detention facilities. I remember one incident when she made reference to the fact that refugees should not be expecting to come to Canada and go to a five-star hotel with little chocolates on the pillow and so forth. I am sure she can recall when she alluded that. I might have misquoted that a bit, but the member could always provide clarification.

Having said that, what we found is that there is a high percentage of refugees in detention who end up in provincial institutions because we do not have adequate space in our detention centres. They are far from first-class hotel services. They are in fact jails. I wonder if the member might want to expand on her hotel theory of a detention centre so members of the House would be familiar with what kind of detention situations we are expecting refugees to be held in.

**Ms. Roxanne James:** Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the opposition parties in committee clearly stated they have a problem with detention as it exists today. It is not necessarily the measures that are coming forth in this particular bill; they actually have a problem with the word “detention” and what it strives to do.

Of the witnesses who were put forward by the opposition parties, one particular witness indicated that 10% of those who arrive in irregular mass arrivals might be a potential problem but the other 90% are okay so therefore we should allow them to all be released into society.

*Government Orders*

I was elected on May 2 to stand up and represent the constituency of Scarborough Centre. I take this responsibility extremely seriously. One of the main responsibilities of any government is the safety and security of its citizens, and that is precisely what this bill is doing, what I am doing and what this government is doing.

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** 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 Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, Official Languages; the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, The Environment; the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Infrastructure.

[English]

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in this House today to speak to the report stage amendments to Bill C-31, Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, which has been introduced by the opposition at report stage.

Some of my hon. colleagues have already spoken about the negative impact the measures in this legislation would have on the government's ability to carry out badly needed reforms to the refugee determination system, reforms Canadians have asked for and expect. Others have spoken about how these measures will prevent the government from being able to crack down on criminal human smugglers who try to abuse Canada's generous immigration system.

In my allotted time today I would like to focus my remarks on how the opposition's irresponsible amendments to gut Bill C-31 will prevent the government from being able to introduce biometric technology for screening temporary resident applicants.

The introduction of biometrics would strengthen our immigration program in a number of ways. As members may be aware, there are several examples of serious criminals, human smugglers, war criminals and suspected terrorists, among others, who have entered Canada in the past, sometimes repeatedly, by concealing or misrepresenting themselves and their history.

Let me give a few examples. Esron Laing and David Wilson were convicted of armed robbery and forcible confinement. They returned to Canada three different times. In fact they are known as the “yo-yo bandits” because just like a yo-yo they kept coming back.

I know that three times seems like a high number, but I am sad to say that many serious criminals are deported and manage to return to Canada many more times than that.

Another example is Anthony Hakim Saunders, who was convicted of assault and drug trafficking. He was deported on 10 different occasions. That is right. It was an astonishing 10 different times. Just like the yo-yo bandits, he kept returning.

Edmund Ezemo was convicted of more than 30 charges, including theft and fraud. He was deported and returned to Canada eight times.

Dale Anthony Wyatt was convicted of trafficking drugs and possession of illegal weapons. He was deported and returned to Canada on at least four separate occasions.

Kevin Michael Sawyers was convicted of manslaughter. He was deported and returned to Canada twice.

Then there is Melando Yaphet Streeby, who served a jail sentence in Canada after he was linked to four underage girls working in Toronto's sex trade. This criminal was deported and returned to Canada within the same year. That is right, all within the same year. Once he returned to Canada, he continued his life of crime.

The use of biometrics would help us prevent these criminals from entering Canada. Let me briefly explain how. Under the existing system, visa applicants only need to initially provide written documents to support their applications. Biometrics, photographs and fingerprints would provide greater certainty in identifying travellers than documents that can be forged or stolen.

In a nutshell, Bill C-31 and regulations that would follow would allow the government to make it mandatory for travellers, students and workers from certain visa-required countries and territories to have their photographs and fingerprints taken as part of their temporary resident visa, study permit or work permit applications.

Biometrics would help with processing applications. Later, when a visa holder arrives at a Canadian port of entry, the Canada Border Services Agency would also use this information to verify that the visa holder is the person to whom the visa was issued.

The use of biometrics would strengthen the integrity of our immigration program by helping to prevent known criminals, failed refugee claimants and previous deportees from using a false identity to unlawfully obtain a Canadian visa and enter our country under false pretences.

Biometrics would also bolster Canada's existing measures to facilitate legitimate travel by providing a fast and reliable tool to help confirm identity. As we can imagine, this would greatly help our front-line visa and border officers to manage high volumes of immigration applicants and the growing sophistication in identity fraud.

While it is easy to see how using biometrics would help our own officials make decisions about visa applications, it is also important to consider how their use may provide benefits to the applicants themselves. After all, in the long run the use of biometrics would facilitate entry to Canada by providing a reliable tool to readily confirm the identity of applicants.

Let me give an example. In cases where the authenticity of documents is uncertain, biometrics could expedite decision-making at Canadian ports of entry. The time spent at secondary inspections could be reduced. Using biometrics could also protect visa applicants by making it more difficult for others to forge, steal or use an applicant's identity to gain access into Canada.

*Government Orders*

●(1640)

To those who may be concerned about the impact of these new measures on travel to Canada, allow me to say that the implementation of biometrics would only apply to a relatively small percentage of visitors to Canada. Indeed more than 90% of visitors to Canada are from countries that are exempt from visa requirements, with visitors from the United States being the most obvious example.

It is also important to note that a number of other countries around the world have already incorporated biometrics into their own immigration and border programs. These include like-minded countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Japan, countries in the European Union, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Because it is becoming so common in international travel, many of these applicants to Canada would already be familiar with the process and have experienced it first-hand in their travels abroad. What is more, the experience of other countries has shown that there is normally only a small short-term drop in application volumes following the introduction of biometrics collection.

I have no doubt that Canada would remain a destination of choice for visitors from around the world, and in the long run the use of biometrics would facilitate entry to Canada by providing a reliable tool to readily confirm the identities of applicants.

As some of my hon. colleagues may know, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand are members of the Five Country Conference, or FCC, an international forum that examines immigration and border security issues. Under the FCC's high value data sharing protocol, Canada shares approximately 3,000 refugee claimants fingerprint records annually with partner countries. Information sharing allows Canada to, a) better identify immigration fraud, b) improve our ability to detect refugee claimants who misrepresent themselves, and c) protect Canadians from foreign criminals.

Biometrics information has uncovered individuals who have used multiple identities and have inconsistent immigration histories and criminal records. For example, information sharing has resulted in, first, the U.K. returning to Australia a wanted rapist posing as an asylum seeker who subsequently pled guilty; second, Canada revoking the refugee status of a man British records proved was an American citizen; and, third, the U.K. taking action against an asylum seeker who FCC records showed had used nine different identities and six different documents across the FCC countries.

Approximately 11% of fingerprint files shared with our FCC partners have resulted in a match. About 13% of these matches have revealed individuals who presented conflicting names, dates of birth or nationalities.

The introduction of biometrics as an identity management tool in our immigration and border control systems is both long planned and long overdue. More and more it is also becoming an international norm. By passing Bill C-31, Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, we would be ensuring Canada keeps up with many other countries.

Collecting biometric data is a highly reliable way to reduce identity fraud while facilitating legitimate travel. As a result, biometrics would strengthen and modernize Canada's immigration processes. I am sure that all hon. members of this House would agree that what I have described is a secure and straightforward process—a no-brainer, so to speak.

Unfortunately, the opposition amendments would prevent the government from introducing biometrics. The opposition's complete lack of concern for the safety and security of their constituents is quite frankly appalling.

The NDP is trying to gut this bill by saying they are okay with criminals, terrorists, war criminals and the like coming into our great country and victimizing innocent Canadians.

I urge the NDP and Liberals to give their heads a shake, to stand up for the safety and security of their constituents and all Canadians and to vote against these ridiculous amendments.

●(1645)

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, first of all let me make it very clear that at no time has the NDP, either in committee or anywhere else, said we support terrorists or other people coming into our country who will place our country in jeopardy.

As a matter of fact, when it came to the biometrics section we supported the use of biometrics as long as it is used for identification and for checking backgrounds to make sure people are not threats to our national security. We have concerns about what else that data could be used for, how long the data would be kept and about its usage by other agencies with which we may share that data.

My question for my colleague across the way is very simple. We know those who are designated as irregular arrivals will have to go to detention centres, or in most of the country they will go to prisons. The minister has said that only children over 16 will be designated as adults and therefore they could go into prison.

Would my colleague share with all of us what would happen to those children who should happen to be on a boat or come by plane because the parents have managed to grab their child—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. The question is over. Before I go to the answer, I would like to remind all hon. members that in a five-minute question and answer period we try to get two questions in and two answers. That is about a minute and fifteen seconds per person. I would encourage all hon. members, as they are addressing the Chair, to look for signals that their time is coming to a close. I reluctantly cut people off, but this afternoon the questions and the answers have been drifting longer and longer.

With that, I will give the member about five seconds to put the question.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member across the way explain, under the current proposed system, what would happen to children under 16?

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Newton—North Delta is very engaged when it comes to immigration issues.

I will get back to the point I was trying to make about biometric identification because it is really part and parcel of the whole immigration bill. When the opposition members are looking to gut the whole bill, they will cut the biometrics, even though they say that they agree with that as a tool.

I will just remind the hon. member about the things we are trying to address here. We are trying to improve relations with safe countries so that we can facilitate travel into this country. I will take the example of Hungary. We received over 4,400 refugee claims last year from Hungary alone. Enacting Bill C-31 will allow us to streamline travel, not just with Hungary but with the entire European Union.

It is really important that the biometric pieces of the bill be passed, along with everything else in the bill, including the turning back of refugee claimants from safe countries.

• (1650)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I looked at the last year's figures for Hungary, for Roma, and there has been a lot of inflating of those who were either abandoned, withdrawn or rejected. These are separate categories. There were 165 accepted as legitimate refugees who needed our protection.

I would ask my hon. friend to bear in mind that some people will take desperate steps to escape unbearable circumstances, and they will bring their families.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** Mr. Speaker, on the topic of Hungary, we do accept legitimate refugees. However, it is a fact that 95% of refugee claims from Hungary were just abandoned, suggesting that these people were not genuine refugees. They did not have the fear to actually pursue their refugee claim in Canada so they just abandoned it and disappeared into the system.

What we are trying to strengthen through Bill C-31 are those kinds of situations where it is clearly a fraudulent refugee claim used to exploit Canada's generous refugee and immigration system. By doing biometrics, by putting the other elements of Bill C-31 in place, we will address those issues.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the good residents of York South—Weston, my constituents, to try to make some sense out of what is happening but I am afraid I am not able to make sense of it.

A bill has already been passed by Parliament to do what the Conservatives have been saying these past many months, since Bill C-4 and now Bill C-31 have come before us. Bill C-11 will take effect. For whatever reason, its implementation was delayed until June of this year, but it will take effect and it will solve the problem of 95% of refugee claimants from some European countries actually abandoning their claims because the provisions in Bill C-11 do precisely what the government says Bill C-31 would do. Therefore, what is the purpose of Bill C-31? It is really to put more control in the hands of the minister by making the minister solely responsible for determining which countries are safe and which are not.

That leads one to speculate wildly about what possible reason it could have for putting such control in the hands of the minister. We

could speculate that it might have to do with the Department of Foreign Affairs or with giving favoured nation status in return for trade agreements. I have no idea. The problem is that we are rushing ahead with a bill that does the same thing as another bill already does. When we examine the difference, it is that the minister would have the power. It does not make sense. The portion of the bill that is new is the part that supposedly deals with human smuggling.

I was listening today to the U.S. ambassador, Luis CdeBaca, who is the head of the U.S. task force on human trafficking. So as we do not get confused, human trafficking and human smuggling are two different things. Human trafficking is engaging in slavery practices in other countries in the world and in countries close to home. What he said made me realize that had the kinds of things the Conservatives are proposing here been in place years ago, they would have prevented the praise that the U.S. ambassador gave us this afternoon.

He said that he was proud of the fact that Canada was one of the very first countries to abolish slavery. In fact, Canada accepted refugees from none other than the United States. Those refugees came to my former hometown of Windsor through the underground railroad. If this law had been in place, who knows what would have happened to those individuals who are now the ancestors of many prosperous and well-deserving families of this country, some in my riding? Those individuals could possibly have been detained in jails for up to a year and prevented from supporting or sponsoring their families. It beggars belief to imagine a regimen similar to what is being proposed by the government to deal with a supposed irregular arrival problem by detaining refugees.

We have heard the government say over and over again that it is on the side of the victims. This is making victims pay. These individuals are the victims of a crime. That crime is perpetrated by the smugglers and yet the government's reaction is to punish the victims. They are the only people it can get its hands on, because the smugglers have long gone, so it punishes them.

I have heard the Minister of Justice suggest that once people know that Canada's laws are such that it is not welcoming and victims will be punished, it will dry up the supply. It is a supply side economics argument, which we have heard a lot from the government, that it will dry up the supply of potential victims of crime.

• (1655)

The problem with that is that there are not a lot of Canadians who read the Criminal Code before they commit a crime, and I doubt very much that there are a lot of people in Somalia, Sri Lanka, or wherever these people come from, who have an opportunity to read Canada's immigration legislation to determine that they will go to jail if they pay someone \$10,000 to bring their family over to Canada. That is just not going to happen. We do not publish our legislation in all the languages that might be spoken in these countries either. It is just strange.

*Government Orders*

In addition to those victims being punished, the minister is suggesting that we will not have to worry because the government will deal with refugee claimants from countries that he has designated as safe countries—he or she, depending on who the minister might be. The minister will determine which countries are safe, and people from those countries will be booted out of this country really fast if they are not true refugees. How do we determine whether they are true refugees? We do that by giving them a chance to plead their case within 14 days. They then have no access to appeal and no access to the Refugee Appeal Division.

There are in fact two classes of refugees. There is a class of refugees who come from countries that the minister has not designated, and we do not know which countries those are yet, and there is a class of refugees who are legitimate refugees in every sense of the word, but who come from countries that the minister designates as safe. They, therefore, would have only one kick to get their suggestion that they are refugees before a tribunal and they have no access to the Refugee Appeal Division. The minister has stated on several occasions that they could file an application in Federal Court. The trouble is that they will be deported long before an application in the Federal Court goes anywhere.

The other thing that bothers me about the attitude of the government toward the whole refugee system is that the minister has suggested on several occasions that he is upset that refugees skip over other countries before they come to Canada, that they should go somewhere else, that they should not come to Canada. I am proud of the fact that they want to come to Canada. We all should be proud that we have such a welcoming and such a wonderful *mélange* of all the countries of the world that people feel comfortable in coming to Canada. We should not force refugees to go somewhere else simply because they happen to pass by another country on the way. That smacks of a being reluctant to take refugees in the first place, although I know that possibly is not what the minister meant.

The minister also talked about jumping the queue. He does not want refugee claimants to be in a position to jump the queue ahead of legitimate immigrant applicants. He has now created the biggest immigrant queue-jump in the history of this country by eliminating what might be 300,000, and I am not sure of the exact number, legitimate applications for immigration to this country with the stroke of a pen and putting everyone else ahead of those people. Every other applicant to this country would now jump the queue if they applied post-2008, or whatever the year was that it was changed. Those individuals have jumped the queue and the rest must start again. That is so wrong, yet the minister says that he does not like queue-jumpers. He is talking out of both sides of his mouth.

The other issue that covers this whole immigration thing is the issue of temporary foreign workers. It is another example of the doublespeak we get from the government about how it wants to welcome refugees and welcome new Canadians, but we will now have a situation where temporary foreign workers are being allowed into this country and will be paid 15% less than everybody else. That will drive down wages. The minister says that it is only for those jobs where we have a shortage. We know there are jobs out there. Airline pilots are being brought in as temporary foreign workers. There is no shortage of airline pilots in this country, but we have companies bringing airline pilots to this country as temporary

foreign workers, and now they can pay them 15% less. That is just going to drive down wages in this country.

Those are the kinds of immigration policies that we do not agree with, including this bill.

● (1700)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the last four minutes of that speech had anything to do with Bill C-31. It had a lot to do with HRSDC, but it had nothing to do with citizenship and immigration or public safety. I appreciate the member speaking about policies that do not relate to the bill.

In any event, I would like to get his response to one thing that is paramount and that he did not speak to.

The NDP has tried to make hay of the fact that, as they say, there are no issues in there that would actually get at the smugglers themselves, in terms of being tough on them.

When we look at the bill itself, there is failure to file to pre-arrival information—our amendments would make it much more difficult for them, from a criminal perspective—as well as failure to comply with ministerial direction and providing false and misleading information. All of these would be tougher on those who have the nerve to smuggle people into this country.

I wonder if the member would say why he will not be supporting the piece of this legislation that would get tough on smugglers who try to bring people into this country and who take advantage of them by taking the money right out of their pockets.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to hear we are going to be able to vote on this bill in pieces, because I will support that piece of the legislation. We have praised that piece of the legislation, which would increase the penalties and the risk to the smugglers themselves. We have said, yes, it is a good thing to increase the penalties for the smugglers.

Our problem is the fact that we would be penalizing the victims. The people who are the victims of crime, the refugees who come into this country, are the ones who would be imprisoned by the government. That we disagree with.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there might be a bit of irony here. Today we are debating Bill C-31 which, in good part, is before us because of two boats that came to Vancouver, the member will recall, the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady*.

Now, if we go back to 1914, the *Komagata Maru* is a boat that came from Asia and was never allowed to land, and we are going to debate that issue tomorrow. People within the Liberal Party and, I suspect, New Democrats and Conservatives would ultimately argue that was a mistake, yet if we listen to what the minister said today in his presentation, he said that is not the way to come. People do not come to Canada via boat; they have to come through legitimate means.

*Government Orders*

Does the member agree that there is some irony there? Tomorrow we are going to be apologizing to the Indo-Canadian community because of the way we treated some 376 individuals who, back in 1914, attempted to land here, yet we just had a minister, and others, say that this is not the way to come to Canada and that they want to prevent that.

• (1705)

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague from Winnipeg North. It is somewhat ironic that there are occasions in this country when we apologize for the very things that we are going to do in the near future or have done in the recent past. We do not seem to learn by our mistakes.

However, I have to remind everyone that irony is often lost on the members opposite.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party seems to want to create two classes of refugees. My colleague spoke brilliantly about this. They may not believe in science, but perhaps the Conservatives believe in astrology. Perhaps they think we can predict the future of potential conflicts and all the rest.

The NDP has a different approach. Perhaps my colleague could talk more about it. Do we need to be flexible, for example, to create a good bill and develop a good process?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP believes that Bill C-11 actually did much of what we are trying to do here, and in terms of the human smuggling portion of the bill, punishing the victims is not the way to go.

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great disappointment that I rise to speak to the amendments put forward by the opposition at report stage. I say “disappointed” because the opposition is playing exactly the sort of petty and blind partisanship that turned Canadians off politics. It is important to explain to Canadians the negative consequences that would result if these opposition amendments were adopted.

The opposition will not admit it, but Canadians know that Canada's immigration and refugee system faces challenges and is open to abuse. The protecting Canada's immigration system act would make Canada's refugee system faster and fairer. This bill would put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and refugees with unfounded claims from abusing Canada's generous immigration system. At the same time, this bill would provide protection more quickly to those who are truly in need. Canadians take great pride in the generosity and compassion of our immigration and refugee programs, but they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and seek to take unfair advantage of our country. The facts speak for themselves. Canada welcomes more resettled refugees than almost any country in the world. In fact, we are increasing that number by an additional 20%. Our tradition of compassion and protection will continue and will grow.

However, our immigration system is open to abuse. Every year, thousands of bogus refugee claimants come to Canada. They choose to file bogus refugee claims in the hope that their lengthy processing

times and endless appeals will result in their obtaining permanent residence in this country. Immigrants to Canada, like me, are very welcoming and fair but we have no tolerance for people from safe countries who abuse our refugee system as a way to jump the queue and get into Canada without having to wait and follow the proper process like everyone else. We have no tolerance for those who take unfair advantage of our generosity.

It is unfortunate, but not surprising, that the opposition parties, NDP and Liberals, conveniently ignore the facts when they speak against Bill C-31. The amendments they introduced at the report stage prove that. These amendments show that the opposition members continue to ignore the facts that underscore the need for this important piece of legislation and undermine the opposition's criticism of it.

These are the facts. In 2011, Canada received 5,800 refugee claims from the European Union alone, a 14% increase from 2010. That means that a quarter of all refugee claims were from the democratic European Union, where human rights are respected. That is more than Africa and Asia. Canada's top source country for refugee claims was Hungary, an EU member state. In fact, in 2011 Canada received 4,400 refugee claims from Hungary alone. In comparison, Belgium received only 188, the U.S. only 47, and France and Norway only 33 each. It is very telling that in 2010, Hungarian nationals made a total of 2,400 refugee claims around the world and 2,300 of those claims were made in Canada. That means that only 100 refugee claims were made in other countries around the world. Canada received 23 times more than all other countries combined.

What is more, in the past few years virtually all of these claims were abandoned, withdrawn or rejected. The majority of these claimants chose to abandon or withdraw their claims, a clear sign they were not in need of Canada's protection. These claimants are, by definition, bogus. They are paid for by hard-working Canadian taxpayers. Canadian taxpayers pay upwards of \$170 million per year for these bogus claimants from the European Union. Taxpayers fund their welfare, their education and their health care. Hard-working taxpayers are sick and tired of footing the bill for bogus refugee claimants who abuse the system at everyone else's expense. Too many tax dollars are spent on bogus refugees.

*Government Orders*

• (1710)

Bill C-31 would put a stop to this abuse. Allow me to illustrate. The bill would help speed up the refugee claims process in a number of ways. It would challenge the designated country of origin policy and enable the government to respond more quickly to increases in refugee claims from countries that generally do not produce refugees. Claimants from designated countries of origin would be processed in about 45 days compared to more than 1,000 days under the current system. The less time claimants spend in Canada awaiting a decision, the less incentive there is for people to abuse our generous asylum system and use it to jump the queue in the regular immigration process. Bill C-31 would also stop the ability of bogus claimants to use endless avenues of appeal to remain in Canada, receiving generous taxpayer-funded health care and social assistance benefits.

Bill C-31 would prevent refugee claimants from submitting a refugee claim at the same time as they apply for humanitarian and compassionate consideration. It would also bar claimants from submitting humanitarian and compassionate applications for one year following a final negative decision from the IRB. In addition, under the balanced refugee reform act, individuals with a final negative decision from the Immigration and Refugee Board would be barred from applying for a pre-removal risk assessment for 12 months.

Taken together, these measures send a clear message to those who seek to abuse Canada's generous refugee system. Those who do not need our protection would be sent home quickly. They would not be allowed to remain in Canada by using endless appeals to delay their removal. At the same time, for those who need refuge, these measures would help to get protection even faster. Every eligible asylum claimant would continue to get a fair hearing by the Immigration and Refugee Board. Again, even with these needed changes, Canada's refugee determination system would remain one of the most generous in the world.

Human smugglers are criminals who operate in the underworld and charge large amounts of money to facilitate illegal immigration. The protecting Canada's immigration system act 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 in order to determine their identity, admissibility and whether or not they have been involved in illegal activities.

As my hon. colleagues know, the detention provisions in Bill C-31 were recently amended and now reflect that the first detention review would occur within 14 days and subsequent reviews every six months.

I note that NDP members supported these amendments at the committee but now they are trying to gut the very amendments they supported. This is more proof that their main goal is to play games rather than work in good faith in the best interest of Canadians.

As before, a person would be released before this time upon being found to be a genuine refugee. As an additional safeguard, the Minister of Public Safety, on his own initiative, at any time, can also

order the release of a detained individual when grounds for detention no longer exist. Mandatory detention would also exclude those designated foreign nationals who are under the age of 16.

The government is sending a clear message that our doors are open to those who play by the rules, but we will crack down on those who threaten the integrity of our borders. With these proposed measures, the integrity of Canada's immigration programs and the safety and security of Canadians would be protected.

Unfortunately, by introducing these irresponsible amendments, the opposition has shown that it does not support strengthening the immigration system. It has shown that it does not support genuine refugees getting protection more quickly or protecting hard-working Canadian taxpayers from having to foot the bill for bogus refugee claimants and human smugglers.

I urge the opposition to stop playing games, listen to the will of their constituents and vote against these amendments.

• (1715)

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague raised the concept of designated safe countries, where the minister can select a country and designate it as safe. The result of that is refugee claimants from that country would have certain rights denied them, like the right to appeal to the Refugee Appeal Division.

In Bill C-11, which preceded this bill, the minister agreed to the concept of having an independent commission made up of a couple of human rights experts who would also have to agree on the minister's decision. The minister himself said that this made the process more transparent and accountable, yet in Bill C-31 the minister has taken that out.

Could the member explain why the Minister of Immigration does not want to have an independent panel as a protection to ensure that a designated safe country is proper instead of leaving that decision solely to a minister of the crown with no independent oversight? Why is that?

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon:** Mr. Speaker, that is not true, because a number of ministries will be involved in that decision.

There are countries that are safe. It is not true that refugee claimants arriving from those countries would be refused some rights that others would enjoy. The process would be faster and they would have the right to appeal.

There were many examples given of European countries. One of the members previously said that refugees should come to Canada rather than go somewhere else. There are many countries in the European Union where they would not have to fly 5,000 miles, as they would to get to Canada. They can get to other safe countries if they really are unsafe in the country in which they live.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what offends many Canadians, and in fact people outside of our borders, is the fact that this legislation will tarnish Canada's leadership role to address a very important world issue, over 10 million refugees worldwide. Canada played a very important role in providing leadership. Many people who came before the committee acknowledged that the bill would tarnish that reputation.



*Government Orders*

I want to focus on one specific aspect, and that is the detention where children will be kept away from their parents. The legislation would do that, at a great social cost. Could the member attempt to defend how a government can justify keeping a mother away from her 8-year-old child because the mother has to be kept in a detention centre, or a jail while the child will be kept in foster care? How does he defend that approach?

• (1720)

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon:** Mr. Speaker, in cases like this the parents would make the decision whether the child would stay with them or be separated.

In reference to a tarnished opinion of Canada and its immigration system, there is nothing more incorrect than that. Canada does more than its fair share in protecting refugees from around the world, in giving them safe refuge in our country. Actually it is the opposite. The world will laugh at us if we do not make those changes to protect genuine refugees from the abuse that happens.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-31, a bill that dramatically changes the refugee system in Canada and, in my respectful view, does so for the worst.

I was our party's immigration critic when the bill was introduced some three short months ago. Following the introduction of the bill, I was inundated by ordinary Canadians and stakeholders alike who were worried and shocked about what the government was proposing.

It is no exaggeration to say that the bill is opposed by every major stakeholder group in the country. Churches, doctors, immigration lawyers, settlement service organizations, academics, refugee groups, cultural organizations and refugees themselves.

Rarely has a bill been so roundly condemned by so many. Why? Because it is readily apparent to anybody who studies this omnibus legislation that the bill is unconstitutional, punitive to refugees and will be completely ineffective in deterring human trafficking.

I am extremely disappointed to be back here at report stage after the Standing Committee on Immigration and Canadians heard many hours of very trenchant and damning testimony. I am disappointed to see that the government has ignored the recommendations of over 40 witnesses representing the full spectrum of the immigration community, who warned about the damaging and misguided effects of the bill.

I am referring to witnesses such as the Canadian Pediatric Society and psychologists who warned of the effect that mandatory detention would have on refugees who had been traumatized by persecution, violence, torture or other atrocities.

The government has ignored this testimony and is moving forward with this backward approach. Most telling, those same groups testified about the particularly damaging effect that detention had on children, whom the bill would also see in detention.

I think of the testimony of Peter Showler, Lorne Waldman and other members of the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, probably the most knowledgeable group of people in the country on refugee law. Peter Showler used to be the head of the Immigration

and Refugee Board. They testified that the accelerated timelines to make refugee claims would be impossible to meet in an adequate manner. In their testimony and their experience hearing cases, this would lead to mistakes and decisions not to grant asylum to bona fide refugees.

I want to pause to say this. Rarely is a mistaken decision more damaging and dangerous than a mistaken decision in a refugee determination case. To be refugees, they have to show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution. This often means they are fearing for their lives. Therefore, a wrong decision could lead to a deportation of someone back to a country where that person might face torture, persecution and death.

That has happened. In the past year there have been cases. There was a case recently of a Mexican refugee claimant denied here, sent back to Mexico, who then was murdered by her ex-husband, a police officer, whom she claimed persecuted her.

Those lawyers also spoke of the provisions for mandatory detention, arbitrary designation of irregular arrivals, denial of appeal to certain classes of refugees and ignoring the best interests of children, all of which went against our Constitution and international conventions alike. The government, unfortunately, ignored that expert testimony.

I think of the testimony of Gina Csayni from the Roma Community Centre in Toronto, who spoke of the real human rights violations and systemic discrimination in Europe. She spoke about how Roma refugees would be negatively affected by having EU countries designated as safe. She spoke about how disheartening and insulting it was to hear our Minister of Citizenship refer to them as bogus and she explained why he was wrong.

I want to pause there and say that we are all very intimately familiar with the persecution, the genocide, against the Jewish people in World War II. What is less commented upon is the fact that Roma, along with the disabled, were also targeted for their ethnicity, rounded up, tortured, medically experimented upon, detained in concentration camps and murdered simply because they were Roma.

This is not just any ethnic group. It is an ethnic group with a history of being the victims of genocide in Europe. There is absolute rock-solid evidence that Romas still face persecution, and states are unable to protect them even today.

• (1725)

The government ignored that testimony. In fact, it doubled down and continued to use inflammatory language referring to Roma refugees as bogus.

We heard from Chris Morrissey and Sharalyn Jordan from the Rainbow Refugee Committee and others who spoke about how the so-called safe country determination process threatened LGBTQ refugees specifically. Over 100 countries of this world have some form of legislative discrimination against the LGBTQ community, including death in some countries.

*Private Members' Business*

Again, the government plows forward as though these stakeholders never spoke.

Experts from Australia, a country the government likes to selectively quote from when its adopting policies it likes, testified that the draconian rules that the government was imposing to try to deter human smuggling—that is, rules that direct punitive elements at refugees—had no deterrent effect at all. Australia has adopted the same procedure that this bill would, and there has been no diminution of refugee claimants coming to the shores of Australia since it adopted those rules years ago. The government ignored that evidence.

The government did make two important changes, and it is important to point that out because it shows what an effective official opposition can do and it shows when parliamentary committees work.

Witnesses and opposition members warned about the impact of clauses 18 and 19. These clauses would allow the minister, through the IRB, to strip permanent residence status from people who had been living in Canada for many years on the basis that conditions had improved in the countries they fled.

The minister said repeatedly that this was not his intention. Actually he went much further than that. He said that the bill categorically did not have this effect. He vociferously and arrogantly derided members of Parliament and stakeholders who brought up the subject. In the end, however, he realized and acknowledged that he was wrong, that he did not understand the effect of the bill that he wrote. He has still not apologized for the vitriol and derision with which he so wrongly defended these clauses.

The other change that the government agreed to was to require a review for the mandatory detention at 14 days and at six months. This came after witnesses, including witnesses sympathetic to the government, had a consensus that this provision was blatantly unconstitutional, as the New Democrats pointed out for months.

This means that the government put forward a bill and could not find one expert in the whole country who deemed it to be charter compliant. This is shocking.

I would also point out the intransigence of the minister who insisted throughout that this bill was constitutional, repeatedly, only in the end to find out, just like the official opposition said and the stakeholders said and the legal community testified, it was not constitutional.

This change notwithstanding, experts still believe other provisions make this bill unconstitutional and we may be tied up in the courts for years figuring that out.

I want go back to the beginning and ask this question. Why this bill? Why does the government insist on going forward with the bill when many of the problems the government claimed to address were already dealt with in the previous Parliament in Bill C-11? We dealt with them when all parties, the Conservatives included, came together and passed the Balanced Refugee Reform Act. We all recognized that the refugee determination system was slow and we put forward reasonable solutions to this problem.

The minister stood in this very House and praised Bill C-11. He said that the amendments that were worked out by all parties in the House made the system faster and fairer and he called that legislation “a monumental achievement”.

When I asked the minister whether he was wrong then or wrong now, he said that he was wrong then. Well, that may be honest, but it does not inspire confidence and it raises serious questions about the real motive behind this bill.

Why would the Conservatives throw a bill in the trash can, a bill that the minister praised, and reintroduce a bill that in previously unamended form was inferior? Even the Minister of Immigration said that.

One part that still puzzles me is the minister's insistence to give himself the power to unilaterally declare a country to be safe. Under Bill C-11, designated persons still have the right of appeal to the Refugee Appeal Division. Under this legislation they do not. Under the previous legislation the minister had to consult with a panel of experts before determining a country to be safe. Under this bill he does not.

On television the minister said that he had run simulations that showed the system under the previous bill would not work. However, when I have asked for the data from these simulations, even under access to information, the minister cannot produce that information.

There is no need for this bill. Canadians know it. The official opposition knows it. The immigration community knows it. The government should withdraw the bill now before serious damage is done to refugees and Canada's reputation as a compassionate country.

• (1730)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member will have five minutes for questions and comments when this bill returns to the House.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

### GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION

The House resumed from April 2 consideration of the motion.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, first I want to commend my NDP colleague on her motion, which the Liberal Party will support with much enthusiasm. We are a little fed up because this issue has been going on for a long time and a lot of money has been spent on it. But I think it is important and essential that the Government of Canada shoulder its responsibility.

I myself was a member of the government at the time when negotiations were taking place concerning the Shannon water situation. Families in Shannon were late in finding out about the situation, which took place close to CFB Valcartier.

In 1997, people learned that the water on CFB Valcartier had been contaminated with trichloroethylene—I will only say it once because it is difficult to pronounce. From now on, I will refer to it as TCE because it is easier to say.

Most certainly, we know that this solvent had been present in the groundwater for several decades. Unfortunately, a cause-and-effect link can be made between it and certain diseases, including cancer.

People were made aware of the situation on the Valcartier base in 1997 and action was taken. Unfortunately, only in 2000 were the people of Shannon, which is close to this base, informed of this problem.

Of course, in 2003, my colleague at the time, Claude Duplain, a Liberal MP, worked with the authorities in Shannon, including the mayor. Then David Pratt, the former minister of defence, offered financial restitution. The conflict was resolved in a friendly fashion with an agreement to give the municipality \$19 million. Then the Conservative government also injected money to hook up the water system and such.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence said that the government was transparent and accountable and that it injected money. In my view, that is not enough.

As my colleagues know, a class action lawsuit was launched in 2007 and is now in progress. The lawsuit was recently heard, but we are still waiting for the decision.

The proceedings ended in November 2011. We are now waiting for an answer to know what will happen. I think it would be only right and proper for the Government of Canada to follow up on that. We are talking about a class action lawsuit involving 2,700 families. Of course, I feel that the government should recognize that it has some responsibility, since this happened on a military base and some concrete action has actually been taken. Concrete action can be taken, but you have to follow through with it. Following through means recognizing your responsibility. For the sake of the many viewers who are watching us today on television, we should perhaps reread the motion.

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) formally recognize the responsibility of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces with regard to the contamination of the groundwater which is the source of drinking water for multiple homes in the residential area of Canadian Forces Base Valcartier, residential areas of the municipality of Shannon, and numerous public institutions, due to the use of chlorinated solvents for several decades, including trichloroethylene (TCE); (b) take over the efforts of the Shannon Citizens Committee to monitor filtration systems in place for those dealing with the contamination of drinking water, and include the Committee in any environmental efforts undertaken; and (c) commit to (i) notify all persons employed at CFB Valcartier or who have lived in the residential quarters of the Base for the years during which the contamination took place, (ii) quickly clean up the affected sites, (iii) compensate victims of TCE contamination.

Can you imagine living in an area and not knowing that such a thing had happened and finding out later that TCE causes digestive and neurological problems and that it is associated with some cancers, including liver and brain cancer?

● (1735)

This is necessarily a matter of public health, a matter of responsibility. Water is a fundamental right. If mistakes were made,

### *Private Members' Business*

then the government necessarily has to be in a position to carry its share of the responsibility.

Obviously, we are perhaps always cautious, as a government, about accepting that responsibility. When we talk about compensation, what does that mean? We owe not just our own families, but also the families of the armed forces our respect. There are people who lived there who are now all over Canada or in other missions and who have these illnesses today. It can also have an impact on the family. I think we have to be transparent.

The Government of Canada took on responsibilities; it not only reached an out-of-court settlement, but invested money in infrastructure. Connections and branch lines were rebuilt, but I think we have to do more than that.

We also have to fully recognize that there was fault. We must certainly also find a way of solving the problem and ask ourselves whether this kind of problem exists elsewhere. In the environmental context, I think it is also important to follow up, to make sure we are able to inform those families, and to use this model for prevention in future.

Work has been done. Health Canada has done its homework in some respects. There is a communication and transparency problem that may have caused other problems. We are not talking about statistics; we are talking about human beings, families children, fathers, mothers and grandparents who have had to live with this.

Water was supplied to Shannon after that. It was just like the problems that happened in Walkerton. When there is a problem with the water, when people have to boil their water and they have to flush out the system to make sure there is no contamination, this is a major problem, particularly if it affects people's health, with the psychological damage that comes with it.

● (1740)

[*English*]

It is imperative that the Government of Canada recognize its responsibility in that case.

The Liberal Party of Canada will support the motion put forward by my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. It is not a partisan issue. It is a public health issue. It is a matter of providing help. We need to find a way to have better communication at least, not only in a corrective sense but also in a preventative sense. We have to make sure that if it is a matter of red tape between departments or if somebody tries to hide, then there should be no impunity.

However, first things first. We have to focus on the population itself. It has suffered enough.

There were some answers and we have to recognize that. It is not a matter of money. It is not about saying the money is there. It is more than that. It is about recognizing responsibility. If we have to go further, then so be it.

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[Translation]

If we recognize responsibility, we have to accept responsibility. The role of a government is to protect the people. There were blunders, there were problems. My colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier is not the only one who has talked about this. My colleague at the time, Christiane Gagnon of the Bloc Québécois, did as well. This is an issue that affects people in the Quebec City region and it is certainly a very significant problem.

I welcome this motion. The Liberal Party of Canada will be supporting it. I have heard the parliamentary secretary respond to the same effect, and I think it would be in good form.

The government has apologized for a number of things in this House in the past, and I think it should apologize for the bad job that was done for the population of Shannon and the people who were living near CFB Valcartier.

If there has to be compensation, why get bogged down in legal action and class action suits? Just think, it has already taken from 2007 to 2011. And we are awaiting the result. I definitely think it is going to be important that the government step up to the plate. We will therefore be supporting the NDP motion.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am speaking today on behalf of all the citizens of Charlesbourg—Haute-Sainte-Charles, the neighbouring riding to Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, who would like to support the citizens of Shannon in their fight for justice.

I would also like to thank my colleague for doing such a good job of standing up for the rights of the people in her riding and the common good in our region.

In my view, the motion by the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier constitutes an official invitation to the government to take an initial step towards a new relationship of respect and trust that needs to be restored between the residents of Shannon and the federal government.

The facts behind this motion go back a long time, and it is important to understand exactly what happened. In 1997, the Department of National Defence found TCE in the groundwater under the land at the Valcartier military base. A few years later, this toxin was discovered in the private wells of the citizens of Shannon, the municipality that neighbours the military base.

The important thing to remember is that TCE is a toxic industrial solvent that was used at the military base. At the time, disposal consisted in simply burying it in the ground in the expectation that there would be no impact.

TCE is a chemical that was used for a long time to remove grease from metal parts and also to dry clean clothes and extract organic products.

Technological advances more accurately identified this product's toxicity, and it was gradually replaced with products less harmful to humans and the environment. It is now banned for personal use in the European Union. The problem is that technological advances have also raised suspicions that TCE is carcinogenic and that it affects the central nervous system.

The cause and effect relationship that lies at the core of this issue and this motion is unfortunately very simple. The TCE that was disposed of in the ground at the military base after use, without any precautions, contaminated the groundwater in Shannon. This contaminated water then found its way into the wells and drinking water systems of thousands of residents in the small municipality.

The consequences that we are now aware of are shameful and excessively harmful to human health. Indeed, in recent years, Shannon has experienced specific health problems and a cancer rate that is five times the average.

The scientific evidence in this case is solid and clearly shows the causal link between the TCE in the groundwater and the abnormally high rates of cancer and other illnesses among current residents.

In addition to those victims, there are the people who lived in Shannon but have since left the municipality. As we know, they are members of the military and they tend to move around.

But the problem facing us today is not a simple public health problem caused by not knowing how toxic TCE was when the army used it. It is not at all the same thing as tobacco, for example.

The problem is that we know that National Defence has been aware of the contamination for over 30 years, yet did nothing.

Scientific research conducted by journalists from Radio-Canada, for example, confirmed that “the government has been aware of the TCE contamination of the water in Shannon and on the military base for [at least] 30 years”.

According to those journalists:

...documents obtained under the Access to Information Act, the federal environment and defence departments were warned that waste water was being discharged into a lagoon connected to the groundwater. The people of Shannon drank that contaminated water for 22 years before discovering the contamination themselves, quite by chance, [around] 2000.

What is very serious about this case is that the government does not want to acknowledge its responsibility and refuses to properly compensate the victims of this crime who are paying with their health and their lives.

Today, the people of Shannon continue to suffer physical and emotional health problems and to develop illnesses such as cancer.

Documents show that more than 350 residents have died from cancer linked to the TCE-contaminated wells in Shannon. In total, more than 500 people have developed cancer in a small town that has a population of barely 5,000.

Another concern was raised by Marie-Paule Spieser, president of the Shannon Citizens Committee.

● (1745)

She said:

There is still a plume beneath our feet, six kilometres long and 600 metres wide, so gases can still pose a risk. There is also a latency period between contact with the product and the onset of cancer.

*Private Members' Business*

We do not know what the future holds, but we know we can expect to see very high cancer rates in Shannon for many years to come. The time has come for the federal government to acknowledge its share of responsibility for groundwater contamination in Shannon because it knowingly buried TCE on federal lands, including the Valcartier military base.

The government's stubborn denial and refusal to compromise are unacceptable. The motion moved today by the NDP asks the government to reconsider its position and take appropriate action in good faith for the people of Shannon, who deserve justice, honesty and compensation from their government.

As the representative of the crown, the government is responsible for problems on Canadian military bases, even if those problems are decades old. The government should step up now with acknowledgement, accountability and compensation for illegal decisions made in the past. That is how to right wrongs and look to the future as a society.

As we speak, the residents of Shannon must still fight alone to defend their rights and eventually see justice done. It is a real David and Goliath story. Until now, the only thing the government has done is to invest \$35 million in infrastructure that connects one part of the municipality of Shannon to a new municipal drinking water supply.

In my view, the government's inaction on this issue is totally unjustified, and a paltry investment in a huge health problem and the contamination that remains is not sufficient. How can this government explain what it is doing and the logic behind it to the residents of Shannon without losing all credibility? The role of the state is to protect the people, not the opposite. Why does this government stubbornly maintain its position of complete denial?

The health aspect of the situation is very serious in and of itself, but I think the financial aspect also deserves attention. The residents of Shannon, over the years, have had to pay out large amounts of money for wells, for bottled water, and so on. These expenditures are totally separate from the decrease in equity that they face because their homes were built right over a contaminated aquifer.

My colleague decided to move this motion because the residents in her riding feel they have been wronged by a government that is supposed to protect them. She is trying to stand up for them, and this is something else the government is supposed to do.

Let us remember that the state is responsible for providing safe and appropriate services to the people. Let us also remember that the state must take the necessary steps to rectify a problematic health situation when it becomes aware of the dangers facing the people.

In this case, it was almost 20 years after the forces were told about the problem that a resident became aware that his water was toxic. Even more time went by before the meagre \$35 million investment was made to improve the water supply and sewage infrastructures, and we will have to wait even longer for real compensation.

This is why, before I conclude my speech, I would like to urge the government to show some compassion and fairness toward all the residents of Shannon who have been suffering from the harmful

effects of their contaminated groundwater for decades now, by supporting my colleague's motion.

It must also make all the necessary arrangements, which are set out in this motion, to ensure that the residents of Shannon receive appropriate compensation and are made part of a fully transparent process for restoring the municipality's infrastructures, cleaning up all the sites and notifying all those who have been affected by the contamination.

This is the only way that the residents of Shannon will ever regain confidence in their government.

• (1750)

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to support the motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, and seconded by the member for Beauport—Limoilou.

I am supporting this motion out of solidarity with the victims of the TCE-contaminated groundwater in Shannon, in the province of Quebec, who want to obtain compensation from the federal government.

I have heard that in past years, the municipality of Shannon has seen health problems and rates of cancer that are five times higher than normal.

Before talking about a resident in my riding of Toronto—Danforth, a victim of the contaminated water in Shannon, I would like to make six important points.

First, as a general principle, the government must add a level of ethical responsibility to its litigation strategy decisions. There are cases—and this is one of them—where it is quite simply inappropriate to defend what is wholly indefensible.

Second, under my colleague's motion, the government should stop its opposition to the request from the victims and negotiate an agreement in a fair and equitable manner.

Third, if the government continues refusing to act acceptably, it must commit not to appeal the court's decision if that decision is unfavourable to the government, out of decency, to bring closure and for the good of the victims.

Fourth, the government should establish a compensation fund for all the victims of Shannon's contaminated water, above and beyond the class members, including and especially those who are diagnosed with cancer associated with this situation in the future.

Fifth, we acknowledge that it is not the current government that caused the harm, but it is important to note that it is responsible as the crown's representative for the harm caused by governments in the past.

Finally, this government will be the one that receives justified praise if it acts in good faith and stops resorting to legal tactics designed to delay a settlement. As a matter of fact, this government's behaviour is only causing the victims more suffering from uncertainty and delays. Even worse, some may well die before justice is served.

*Private Members' Business*

As I was saying earlier, Yves Boucher is with us today. He is a resident in my riding of Toronto—Danforth and has been severely affected by the contaminated water in Shannon. He is now living with brain cancer. Mr. Boucher has permitted me to share his story with you today, and I would like to thank him.

Yves has lived in Toronto for nearly 20 years. He served our community proudly as a firefighter. He was active and in good health. A few years ago, he started to feel numbness in his arm when he was driving the fire truck. After a few consultations, it was discovered that, at age 42, Yves had brain cancer.

In less than 24 hours, his life changed completely. Yves can no longer work at the job he loved as a firefighter, and he is now very limited in what he can do. The life of his partner, David, has also been turned upside down.

• (1755)

His cancer limits his life in all sorts of ways: memory loss, difficulty speaking and other frustrations caused by the many medications he takes. His personal life has been affected, of course. His partner and he have had their ups and downs together. He has been abandoned by some of his friends, who were unable to accept the sadness of the situation. Everything is even more frustrating in that he has suffered these things because of a mistake made by the government, a government that did not even have the decency to inform the people who had lived in the area around Valcartier about the contamination.

In fact, Yves learned the reason for what had happened to him from a friend, who had heard a customer talking about the poor children in Valcartier who had drunk the water and who now had cancer.

Before hearing that news, Yves did not know the cause of his cancer. It is unforgivable that he heard this news by word of mouth rather than from official information. Yves is one of the 3,000 people affected who formed the Shannon Citizens' Committee in March 2007 and launched a class action against the government of Canada, the SNC-Lavalin Group and SNC Technologies.

What he is asking is for all victims who have had the same thing happen to them be compensated and have the costs of their drugs, in particular, covered. The shining light in this whole story comes from Mr. Boucher's courageous and impressive attitude.

In conclusion, the purpose of this motion is to urge the crown to recognize the responsibility of the Minister of National Defence and the Canadian Forces for the contamination of the water table; decontaminate the affected sites; and compensate the victims of the TCE contamination.

Like all other Canadians, all the families who live on or near a military base have the right to live in a healthy and clean environment without being afraid of harm to their health.

I urge my colleagues from all parties to support this motion in solidarity with Yves Boucher and all the victims of the TCE-contaminated water in Shannon.

• (1800)

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I rise in the House

rather reluctantly. I rise reluctantly because of the subject matter, but I rise proudly in support of the motion moved by my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, namely Motion M-273. It is very reluctantly that I must rise in the House to speak to this matter after years of controversy and with so many families suffering.

I must admit that, for the first time, I had a hard time preparing my 10-minute speech because my first instinct was simply to stand up for two seconds, just enough to ask that this be resolved once and for all. I had to make a great deal of effort to prepare the few points I will address over the course of the next 10 minutes because, really, we have reached the stage where this needs to be resolved and we all need to support this motion. It is a matter of human dignity.

Let us talk about the problem's source, no pun on wells intended. Trichloroethylene is considered to be carcinogenic by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. When inhaled at high levels, it can induce a coma and cause death. It is an industrial solvent that was used at CFB Valcartier for decades starting in the 1930s and buried in the soil. That was a very long time ago.

As an aside, if any industry in the private sector had taken the liberty of burying a potent carcinogen in the ground for years, something tells me that the matter would have been resolved long ago.

In 2000, water from private wells belonging to residents of the municipality of Shannon was analyzed, and a high level of trichloroethylene was detected. More than 2,000 families, from whole neighbourhoods where fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters live, learned that a potent carcinogen had been flowing from their taps for decades. Years later, we are realizing that the cancer rate in that area is five times higher than the national average. I repeat: five times higher. We can imagine how families feel when they come to the following conclusion: they were poisoned for decades by a carcinogen and the consequence is that it is five times more likely that their two- or three-year-old son or daughter will get cancer. I am also speaking on behalf of parents who do not have cancer or do not have a child with cancer right now. They have committed no crime in their life, they are guilty of nothing, but they know that it is five times more likely that their three-year-old child will get cancer.

Furthermore, we can only imagine what effect this is having on Canada's image, as the government continues to drag its feet on this issue, challenging and questioning these families for decades. The Internet is full of comments like this. It is no longer even a question on Wikipedia:

Groundwater is the sole source of water for 25%...of the Canadian population... The municipality of Shannon, a municipality in the province of Quebec...conducted analyses and noted that the water table is contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE), which has caused an increased incidence of cancer in the region. The people of the municipality decided to launch a class action lawsuit against the Government of Canada, which has known about the problem for 30 years.

Comments like that can be found all over the Internet. What a stain on Canada's reputation. It is no longer even being challenged by any groups. It appears everywhere. For 30 years, the government knew about the contamination. The people who have been affected are suing, but it takes forever to obtain justice. What a stain on Canada's reputation.

*Private Members' Business*

In 2009, the government spent \$35 million to connect part of the municipality of Shannon to a new water supply system. At the same time as it was doing that, it maintained that the crown was not to blame. Nine years had gone by—from 2000 to 2009—between the time that it was clearly established that concentrations of a powerful carcinogen were much too high and the implementation of a solution, with which the crown washed its hands of the problem. Nine years is how long it takes for a family to produce three or four children, and, I repeat, these children are now five times more likely to develop cancer.

● (1805)

I repeat once more: just imagine what it must be like for the victims who now have cancer—people who lived in Shannon. Imagine what it must be like for those who lived in Shannon for some time between 2000 and 2009 and whose young children drank water containing a powerful carcinogen.

There is a price to pay for having failed to pay compensation to Shannon. There is a social price to pay for having resisted and for having dragged its feet while the problem continued. Imagine the stress felt by the parents. I have spoken about it twice now. Millions of dollars were spent on lawsuits by both parties, money that could have been put to much better use by paying these people compensation. It is now said that tens of millions of dollars have been spent, not to help the victims, but to continue with endless legal proceedings and court challenges.

Just think about the deep injustice felt by a 15-year-old victim who once lived in Shannon. She feels stress because she is wondering whether she will be able to live a normal life, and watches as her own government challenges a class action to redress a serious public health problem. How can she feel confident, first of all towards her country and then towards the government? How can she feel confident enough to get on with her life? This burden has been handed down to a whole generation of people in the Shannon area. How much less effective will they be at work, for example, with such a legacy, such a weight on their shoulders, and the stress they have experienced for years?

Public health authorities have testified in connection with the class action. They explained that the population of Shannon was too small for statistical studies. That is basically all that remains as a basis to challenge the class action by the people of Shannon. The situation is now completely preposterous. The thing to learn from this kind of logic is that if a group of people should ever become ill, then they should make sure that there are a lot of them. Because if there are not enough of them to be so sick that they are dying, then statistically, it will be impossible to prove that it was the introduction of a carcinogen or some other substance into a well that made them all sick.

Thus, if a group of people has to be ill in Canada, there had better be at least 300,000 suffering from the same thing. Otherwise, the statistics are not valid. In a group of 250 people, 25 could die, but it would not be enough to prove that contamination was the cause. This justification for not helping the people of Shannon puts us squarely in the realm of the absurd and the unacceptable.

There was one piece of bad news, among the many given to the people of Shannon, that particularly bothered me. In February 2011,

the lawyer for the Shannon Citizens Committee, Charles Veilleux, was audited by the Canada Revenue Agency, just a few days before the start of this important case. The president of the Shannon Citizens Committee, Marie-Paule Spieser, did not believe it could be a coincidence.

All the commentators that I read at the time were outraged by the thought that, suddenly, three days away from such a complex trial, Mr. Veilleux was subjected to a major audit. This case had been backed by Mr. Veilleux, who was up to his neck in debt primarily because of his decade-long effort to help the people of Shannon. I raise my glass to Mr. Veilleux, who deserves to be toasted. It is just water, but it is not contaminated. Not one of the commentators I read that week had even a shadow of a doubt that it could have been a coincidence. It was unacceptable.

I will conclude with a fairly simple principle—the duty of a government. When a public health problem is serious, we must help the people. We can no longer hide behind the statistics, as former military personnel sometimes did, and say that the evidence may not be adequate.

● (1810)

If people are suffering because of huge mistakes made by the army or an industry, we must simply do our duty as a government and help them.

**Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I rise here today to speak to a problem that has gone on for far too long in the Quebec City region.

I do not know if anyone has explained so far exactly what Shannon is. Shannon is a small municipality located next to a military base where a part of Quebec City's anglophone community lives.

Everyone is familiar with the facts, so I will not repeat them in detail. Briefly, first the groundwater was contaminated and no information was given right away. Many years passed and then a class action lawsuit was launched. We are now waiting for the judge's ruling following a trial that did not happen until last year.

While many elements of the motion are at the heart of the lawsuit, I still think it is important to talk about certain essential matters. Is it not essential that we protect the health of our soldiers, their families, their neighbours and, in fact, all Canadians? Is that not a duty that we must constantly fulfill? Is that not at least part of why we are here?

If that is why we are here, it should give us some perspective on the problem.

I am deeply disappointed that a health issue has become an issue of money. I believe that as responsible human beings, we must ensure the well-being of the public, regardless of where they are. I find it unimaginable that the government is refusing to resolve this problem and telling people that they can live next to the military base, but at their own risk. This is unacceptable.

I believe that DND's bases should be peaceful and safe neighbours for their community. If the government looked at the problem from that angle, then maybe it could change its mindset.

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I am not looking to blame anyone because there was a time when waste was disposed of in a certain way and people were unaware of the possible consequences of their actions. Now, we know better.

However, ignorance does not mean it is okay to forget about the consequences. As responsible beings, even if we did not know about the long-term problems, it is imperative to solve them now.

I think it is terrible that millions of dollars are being spent on legal fees while the health and daily problems of the people are being forgotten. Let us talk about health. Let us talk about the water supply. Let us talk about how the property values have dropped dramatically. I can attest to the fact that there was a time when no one wanted to live there.

It is tragic. I would have expected the Department of National Defence and the government to take action. I am not specifically blaming the Conservative government. I want to be clear about that. I am instead criticizing the way it is handling this problem. I think it is terrible that the government is looking at this from the perspective of civil and commercial responsibility instead from the perspective of the health and protection of individuals.

• (1815)

I find it very ironic. The purpose of a military base is to increase protection, but in this case, it is not protecting its neighbours.

I have a really hard time accepting this paradox. We were justified in expecting some co-operation. Yes, I recognize that things are being done right now. But even though things are being done today, we also have to think about the damage of the past. That is important, and we have to fix it. It is important for our country's reputation, but also for the dignity of the people in question and of our armed forces.

I do not think that the members of our military want to put their neighbours' health in danger. Of course not. No way would they want to do that. That is not what they are all about. No one has those kinds of values. Why not fix the problem? Why spend money on lawsuits that will only benefit big law firms?

I would really like to know how much all this has cost the government. If the money had been invested in addressing the problem, what portion of the problem would have been solved already without anyone losing out? When you lose face, you are on the losing side. People suffered damages, and, as a society, we have to be able to repair those damages.

We live in society, in an environment, in a community. It is essential for relations between communities to be maintained. It is essential for there to be mutual trust between the people who live near a military base, the base itself and the Department of National Defence. These things are important, and they must not be taken lightly. These relations are absolutely vital, and how the problem is addressed is an important indicator of the state of the relationship.

If the current legal challenges continue, and are possibly lost later on, what message will that send not only to the people who live around the Valcartier military base, but to those who live near other military bases? Will it become necessary to build a no man's land around our military bases? I do not think so, and I am just speculating, of course. What I do believe in is the relations between

the diverse communities and the ability of the armed forces to guarantee a level of security, not only in its everyday operations, but in its environment.

Sometimes, completely uncontrollable things can happen. This is understandable, but once they happen, the problems have to be addressed.

What, basically, is this motion about? What it seeks is simply an honourable way out for all the parties involved. There is no attempt to find a guilty party, but rather an attempt to repair previous damage. The idea is to stop the legal expenses and solve the problem. That would be the most cordial and respectful way of doing things.

That is why I am asking the government to vote for the motion, agree to an out-of-court settlement, which would certainly be a step forward, and act in a dignified manner in everyone's interest.

• (1820)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. I would ask that she keep her comments to five minutes.

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate and thank all of my colleagues who stood in this House to support Motion M-273, which I was proud to move on behalf of the citizens of Shannon whose lives have been turned upside down by the tragedy that struck their municipality.

The support and compassion shown by my colleagues in this House are invaluable to the former residents of Shannon, some of whom are here with us today.

[*English*]

As we know, many victims of this terrible tragedy are former or active members of our proud Canadian Forces. They have made many sacrifices to serve this country with dignity but now seem to have been forgotten or, worse, pushed away by the government.

This motion is incredibly important for the current and former citizens of Shannon, who have been seeking justice for many years.

The victims of the TCE contamination have suffered many losses and hardships through no fault of their own, and yet no one will take responsibility for what happened to them.

[*Translation*]

The victims of the TCE contamination of Shannon's water supply have still not been fairly compensated for their suffering, after more than 10 years of fierce battles. Even today, many people who suffer from illnesses linked to the intake of TCE, like cancer and the other illnesses mentioned earlier, still do not know why they are sick, because no one has told them about what happened in Shannon. This is totally unacceptable.



This government must act now, before the judge renders his verdict. This government must compensate the known victims of the contamination and their families, as well as those who have suffered or are still suffering without knowing why. The government has a moral obligation to do everything in its power to inform those who may have been affected by TCE contamination and to offer them the fair compensation they deserve, with a victim compensation fund for those who are not parties to the current class action.

[*English*]

My Conservative colleagues should not forget that the victims of the TCE contamination do not only live in my riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, as was demonstrated by my colleague from Toronto—Danforth. As I have mentioned before, many of them were current or former members of the Canadian Forces who served at the military base in Valcartier in the past but have since moved away to serve in other bases across this country.

Many of the victims of the TCE contamination in Shannon now live in Conservative ridings and are expecting their members of Parliament to stand up for them and get them the justice they so rightly deserve.

[*Translation*]

It is extremely disappointing that the victims of the TCE-contaminated groundwater are once again being abandoned by their government, which has already indicated that it intends to vote against this motion. The government is still refusing to admit the crown's responsibility in this tragic situation and to negotiate an out-of-court settlement with the Shannon Citizens Committee.

About two weeks ago, we learned from the report released by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development that there are still several thousand contaminated federal sites across the country. The bill to fully decontaminate the affected sites would come to over \$7 billion. On this excessively long list of contaminated federal sites is, of course, the municipality of Shannon, as well as the land on the Valcartier military base.

As my colleagues know, toxic chemicals, in particular trichloroethylene, have been dumped or buried since the 1930s on land that was, and still is, federal government property. These toxic substances have gradually leaked into the soil and contaminated the groundwater under the Valcartier base and the municipality of Shannon and as far away as Quebec City, including the Val-Bélair area.

• (1825)

[*English*]

A lot of work remains to be done in Shannon to clean up the water, but the most recent report by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development is not reassuring in that regard. In his report, the commissioner states that while many federal contaminated sites have been successfully dealt with, the remaining sites, like Shannon, will be much harder to clean up. There are many reasons to explain that reality, but I would say that one of the main reasons for this is that the Conservatives decided to cut over 60% of the remaining budget to evaluate the health and environmental risks and take care of the decontamination operations. In view of all the work that remains to be done, I think we can all agree that this was quite a bad decision.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

Even though the contamination in Shannon was discovered in 1997, TCE, sadly, can still be found in the water, and unfortunately it seems that it will remain there for many more years.

Some decontamination efforts have been made in past years, but it is too little, too late, as government funding to clean up those toxic chemicals is insufficient and irregular at best.

[*Translation*]

Since the debate began, I have heard several arguments in favour of the motion, but the most important argument is about doing justice to the victims of the contamination and their families. They have suffered too much. Yes, some steps have been taken and we recognize that some efforts have been made in the past, but much more needs to be done.

[*English*]

I urge all my colleagues to do what is right and support my motion.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 30, 2012, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I rise again in this House today on another matter: to decry the end of official language training at the Canada School of Public Service.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

After cutting the number of translators at the Translation Bureau, now this Conservative government is attacking second language teachers. With the end of French and English second language courses at the School of Public Service, nearly 200 teachers are losing their jobs.

From now on, federal institutions will have to rely on the private sector for language training and miss out on the specific expertise the government has developed over the years. The Conservatives' main argument to justify this draconian change to these government services is, of course, you guessed it, the supposed cost savings resulting from this change.

According to this government, the private sector can offer the same services at a lower cost. We are starting to get used to the Conservatives' broken record, which, more often than not, just does not add up. Before accepting this Conservative dogma for absolute truth, let us start by looking at the facts.

First of all, every department is responsible for ensuring that its own employees receive language training. Each department will therefore select the institution with which its employees will do business and which second language program they will take. Decentralizing language training to such an extent makes it very difficult, if not almost impossible, to obtain information on the real cost of language training in this context.

But frankly, should we really be surprised at the lack of disclosure and the unavailability of information from this government? The Conservatives have a strong tendency to hide figures, and this is not going to change anytime soon. Moreover, an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* last December reported an increase in the cost of language training at the Treasury Board Secretariat over the past few years. Between 2006 and 2010, the average fee paid by the department apparently increased from \$429 to \$943. We are talking here about \$2 million every year.

In this case, clearly, using the private sector to try to cut spending has failed miserably. With the end of language training by the Canada School of Public Service, questions may well be asked about the quality of the courses that will be offered by the private sector. As I mentioned earlier, over the years, the Canadian government has developed expertise and specific standards in language training.

In the private sector, there is none of this standardization, and this raises a number of concerns. First, how is the market regulated? Are the services provided by private institutions evaluated somehow? Even though the Public Service Commission still monitors the evaluation of public servants' language skills, it does not evaluate the quality of the courses given. If the training received by public servants falls short of the mark, they will just have to spend more time in the classroom to reach the bilingualism level required for the job, and this will just drive up costs over the years.

In addition, on May 10, the Commissioner of Official Languages appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, of which I am a member. In his testimony, Mr. Fraser announced that his office would be conducting extensive research into the changes made by this government to the way in which language training is provided to Canadian public servants. The commissioner too has a number of concerns about maintaining the quality of language

training for government employees. During his appearance before the committee, the commissioner said:

I decided that we have to see what the outcome of those changes has been and whether language training continues to be as effective. I admit that I have a certain bias. I still believe that some people pass their exams but are not able to communicate, whereas others are able to communicate, but cannot pass their exams.

Even the Commissioner of Official Languages is concerned about the potentially negative impact of eliminating the language training offered by the Canada School of Public Service. Will the Conservatives also try to discredit him because he does not share their twisted vision of Canadian bilingualism? That would not be surprising. Unfortunately, ever since the Conservatives became the government, it has become clear that bilingualism is at the bottom of their priority list.

How can the government justify cutting 200 good jobs, when there is no guarantee of savings? How can it justify the privatization of an effective public service that Canadians need to receive proper services in the language of their choice?

• (1830)

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would first like to say that most of what the hon. member said is absolutely false.

I am happy to rise in the House to speak to the question of language training, and more specifically the way this training is provided.

First, we are well aware that the private sector and the universities and colleges have recognized expertise and the resources to provide language training directly to the public service.

In fact, before the changes in question, the Canada School of Public Service was already playing a minor role in the direct delivery of language training to the public service. The school's expertise will continue to be used to develop learning methods and technologies, in particular, access to online language training, linguistic products and the creation of language learning plans.

• (1835)

[*English*]

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to correct the previous statement of my hon. colleague about our government's record on economic management.

Canada's economic performance during the recovery from the global financial economic crisis has been nothing short of remarkable. Members do not have to take my word for it, though; our economic leadership during the global economic crisis has been recognized around the world.

Last year both the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development forecast we would have among the strongest economic growth in the G7 in 2011 and again this year. For the fourth year in a row, the World Economic Forum rated Canada's banking system as the world's soundest. In addition, three credit rating agencies, Moody's, Fitch and Standard and Poor's, have reaffirmed their top investment grade ratings for Canada. *Forbes* magazine recently rated Canada the world's best place to do business.

By any standard, Canada has weathered the global economic crisis and ongoing financial uncertainty well, particularly when compared to most other developed nations. If my hon. colleague does not want to take the word of these respected organizations, I encourage her to look at the facts. The numbers do not lie.

Since introducing Canada's economic action plan in response to the economic downturn of 2008, we have recovered more than all of the output and all of the jobs lost during the recession. About 750,000 more Canadians are working today than when the recession ended, resulting in the strongest rate of employment growth during the recovery by far among G7 countries. Real GDP is now significantly above pre-recession levels, the best performance in the G7.

We do not intend to rest on our laurels. That is why we are freeing businesses to grow by cutting red tape that can stifle productivity. That is why we are creating opportunity through our move to open government. That is why we are reducing the deficit and balancing the budget over the medium term.

The government has a clear plan for Canada and the Canadian economy based on sound economic management, and the plan is working.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Éline Michaud:** Madam Speaker, I like it so much when my colleagues rise in the House to boast about their excellent economic management, when they are not even capable of getting themselves out of the F-35 scandal. They are wasting billions of taxpayers' dollars, when taxpayers would honestly much prefer to see that money invested elsewhere, maybe to provide bilingual services for Canadians everywhere. So in that respect I found it very amusing.

A number of witnesses came to see us at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. They explained the need for standardization in language training courses, because there is none at present. There are no standards. There is no way to ensure quality or determine whether the courses are equivalent or equal in same quality to the government's.

I would like my colleague to explain exactly where he sees this standardization could exist and how the government could guarantee quality. The Commissioner of Official Languages is also concerned, as are a number of other people. I would like to get a clear answer.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to point out the enormous progress we have made since Parliament enacted the Official Languages Act in 1969.

The vast majority of official language minority communities have access to federal services in the official language of their choice. Forty years ago, those communities had to communicate with federal

institutions in the majority language. In 40 years, we have gone from a virtually unilingual public service to a bilingual public service.

[*English*]

Our road map for Canada's linguistic duality, which we adopted in 2008, supports English and French minority language communities and ensures Canadians can obtain government services in both official languages. We can be proud of how far we have come and, as we move forward, we do so knowing there is an excellent foundation to build on.

[*Translation*]

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to return to a question that I raised on February 17, 2012, about the government's record on climate change.

As chance would have it, since I asked my question, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has issued a report on the Conservative government's performance with respect to the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act passed by Parliament in 2007 to ensure that Canada meets its commitments and obligations.

The Conservatives boast that they are champions of law and order. They may preach observance of the law, but they themselves flout it.

In 2007, Parliament passed an act requiring the government to publish annual climate change plans and to explain how it intends to achieve the emission targets set by the Kyoto protocol.

The Commissioner of the Environment is responsible for verifying whether the government is fulfilling its obligations — hence his most recent report. As one might imagine, the results are pathetic.

The commissioner's judgment is terse: the Conservatives have not managed to reach the Kyoto protocol targets. To meet the 6%, Canada would have had to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 805 million tonnes more by 2012.

However, here is what irritates me most. I quote the Commissioner:

If all the measures in the annual climate change plan had been implemented and the total expected reductions in the plan had been achieved, it would still not have been sufficient to meet the government's Kyoto Protocol target. To meet the target, GHG emissions would have to be reduced by an additional 805 million tonnes by 2012.

More clearly stated, this means that the Conservative government did not even try to meet the Kyoto targets. Not trying is worse than failing.

The government recently confirmed that it would rescind the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act. To avoid having to face the public, the amendments were included on page 401 of the Budget Implementation bill. Thus the Standing Committee on Finance will have to study the elimination of Canada's international obligations with respect to the Kyoto protocol at the same time as examines amendments to 60 other acts. It is ridiculous.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

We in the NDP would have liked to have the budget implementation bill split to allow the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to be responsible for studying amendments concerning environmental statutes. Would that not be logical? Apparently not for the government, which hopes to keep out of the public eye.

We will not let the government do that. We are going to give Quebeckers and Canadians the opportunity to be heard. The NDP will be organizing five large meetings across Canada so that ordinary people can provide their opinions on the budget implementation bill. One meeting will be held in Montreal, near my riding, on Wednesday, May 23, in the Saint-Pierre centre on Panet Street. There is still time to change things. We need an open debate for the health of our democracy.

I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment a few questions. Will the Government of Canada finally be honest with Canadians about the costs related to climate change? Will it be honest with Canadians about the sectors that will be affected by the cuts made at Environment Canada? Will the minister stop muzzling scientists and admit that an open debate is necessary to the well-being of our democracy? Will it listen to Canadians who want to leave their children a better, more sustainable, greener and more prosperous country, or will it continue to govern with blinders on?

The government is attacking not only our environment, but also our democracy by preventing an open debate. This very morning, three Government of Canada ministers appeared at a parliamentary committee without notice and gave testimony for an hour. After having regurgitated the talking points from the Prime Minister's Office, they did not leave the members much time for questions.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary if she will allow an open and honest debate.

• (1840)

[*English*]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am really glad to be able to address my colleague opposite tonight. Since she has moved portfolios, and I congratulate her on her new appointment, we have missed her at the environment committee greatly.

At one of the most recent environment committees, we had the Commissioner of the Environment come and talk about his most recent report. In April of this year, the most recent report on greenhouse gas emissions in Canada was released. That data showed that while the economy grew by 3.2%—meaning we saw a growth in the economy and an expansion of industry—our greenhouse gas emissions virtually stabilized. There was only a 0.25% increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

For the first time in this country, we are seeing the economy grow while greenhouse gas emissions growth stabilizes. This is a very good thing.

I will bring the member up to speed on what was said in that meeting. One of my colleagues asked,

Did I hear correctly that the inventory data that was not reflected in your report dealt with 2010 emissions?

The environment commissioner replied,

That's correct. There's a lag between the year and when Environment Canada compiles all the data and releases it.

Those data were not reflected in the most recent report, and in fact the regulations that we are putting in place on certain sectors of the economy were not included in the forecast as well.

What we are trying to do is, again, balance environmental stewardship. We understand the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this country, but we also need to do that while encouraging economic growth.

The original question my colleague put on the order paper, and I am not sure if she remembers, dealt with the \$35 million for climate change research that was announced through the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada.

In the member's new portfolio, I would like to talk about an institution, a granting council that I worked with quite extensively in my previous career and this great program, because I would like to encourage my colleague to vote for our budget. We are investing heavily in science and technology, specifically in an institution she should be quite familiar with at McGill University.

In fact, a search of McGill University's NSERC grants since fiscal year 2006 shows an investment of over \$250 million in McGill University. There are actually at least two Canada Research Chairs in climate change; I think there are more than that. I would encourage the member to go and talk to her colleagues who received NSERC funding since our government has been in power. I encourage her to talk to them about the impact of NSERC funding on their careers.

What we are doing in this budget is actually increasing funding to the granting councils. For example, we are providing \$500 million to the Canada Foundation for Innovation over five years. This is a great program that provides research infrastructure to researchers across the country.

I certainly hope that she would support important investments into research and development across the country, and specifically I would like to remind the member about the investments that our government has made in climate change research. In fact, since 2006 we have invested over \$252 million to support regulatory activities to address climate change and air quality.

Another institution that the member should familiarize herself with in her role is Sustainable Development Technology Canada. This is a great organization that works on commercializing technology that is related to clean energy.

All of these institutions work to address problems related to industry use and to resource development and climate change here in our country. We are actually best practice leaders in a lot of this research.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I hope she will go and talk to her leader, who is pitting workers and regions against one another. I hope she will support cross-Canada research that we are investing in that addresses these problems.

• (1845)

**Ms. Laurin Liu:** Madam Speaker, while the Conservative government has an abysmal record on attacking climate change, it is trying to take credit for what the provinces have been doing. We know that in my home province, the provincial government has taken various efforts to try to reduce its greenhouse gases.

While the government has an abysmal record, it is trying to take credit for work that it did not do. The parliamentary secretary also mentioned the Sustainable Development Technology Canada program, which it cut in this budget.

We are missing out on an occasion to participate in the \$1 trillion global green technology market.

[Translation]

Despite what my hon. colleague said, budget 2012 and Bill C-38 are two more measures that prove that the Conservative government does not care about the environment.

First of all, Bill C-38 confirms the repeal of the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act. Then, it eliminates the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, an organization that advises the government on sustainable development. Initially, the minister said that the organization was being abolished because the unique research it did was available on the Internet. However, the government recently admitted that it had been embarrassed by the organization, which was a thorn in the government's side—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but her time has run out.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment.

[English]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Madam Speaker, my colleague opposite prefaced her answer with “working with provinces” or “the work that provinces have done”. I find this so timely, given that her leader has come out and accused provincial premiers who are standing up for their economy and speaking against the derogatory terms he has used this week in the media and will not step back from. Working with provinces does not entail denigrating their resource sectors when we should be looking at a united Canada and a united economy.

The last thing I will highlight tonight is the \$35 million to support climate change and atmosphere research that the National Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada has undertaken. The program was launched in March. I encourage people across the country to look at the results that will come out of this funding and the cross-Canada research collaborations that will be created because of it.

• (1850)

[Translation]

## INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for being here this evening. I appreciate it.

The ice storm that hit the Magdalen Islands in February 2012 demonstrated the importance of transportation infrastructure and focused attention on extending the runway at the Magdalen Islands airport, an issue that has dragged on for 30 years.

At the time of this sad event, Quebec Premier Jean Charest noted the importance of extending the runway. Subsequently, we learned that, during this major power outage, the airport's generator failed. I would like to remind members that the Magdalen Islands archipelago is located more than 100 kilometres from the Gaspé, in the middle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The residents of the Magdalen Islands revel in their isolation, but it does create major transportation challenges, which the Conservative government must address. Air transportation is the only direct link between the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands. The alternative is very long: a five-hour ferry ride to Prince Edward Island and then a ten-hour drive to the Gaspé.

Airport service is vital in emergency situations, as well as for personal travel, business and tourism. The federal government has recognized this situation by designating the Magdalen Islands airport as a remote airport. Transport Canada therefore manages the airport.

Since 1983, the main runway has been 4,500 feet long, when most runways in less remote areas are 5,500 feet or longer. Why do the people of the Magdalen Islands have one of the shortest runways in Quebec? In extreme weather conditions, planes are often forced to call off their landing or turn back.

The air ambulance, which transports patients who cannot be treated on the Magdalen Islands, also faces the same situation. The people of the Magdalen Islands are wondering if this government realizes that, for people living in remote communities, this transportation infrastructure is crucial and that they should not have to settle for second-class infrastructure.

The existing runway is hindering economic development. Such a short runway limits the kind of aircraft that can land regularly and is preventing larger carriers from serving the islands. The people of the Magdalen Islands are worried about the future renewal of air fleets—meaning Dash 8s. The community has been rallying for years now to have the runway lengthened.

Lengthening the runway by 1,400 feet in two stages would help support the development of the archipelago, promote safe landings in frequent extreme weather conditions and reduce the number of cancelled flights and missed approaches. The islands want development. We have more tourism, more exports and more young people who are leaving the island to continue their training than we did 30 years ago.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The people of the Magdalen Islands are looking towards the future and calling on Transport Canada to do the same regarding the airport. Will this government finally support the people of the Magdalen Islands?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, we have already provided support to the Magdalen Islands through investments in the airport and elsewhere in the community.

I can assure the hon. member that the Magdalen Islands airport infrastructures are safe and able to respond adequately to the needs of the commercial aircraft that regularly serve the airport. They are also able to accommodate fully loaded search and rescue aircraft. In fact, no official request to lengthen the main runway has been received from the airlines providing service to the airport.

Unless it receives objective safety information that shows a real need, Transport Canada considers that the investment of more than \$10 million—that would be needed to lengthen the runway by 5,900 feet—is not justified on the basis of the information that we have.

I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this issue that is so important for his constituents. I would like to remind him that the primary goal of the government and the Department of Transport is to ensure the safety of our system. According to the information currently at our disposal, the system on the Magdalen Islands is safe. We are going to continue co-operating fully with the community and the islanders in order to maintain the system's safety.

• (1855)

**Mr. Philip Toone:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary.

I would like to clarify a few points: the request is for 5,500 feet and not 5,900 feet. It would cost less than the \$10 million mentioned. We are not asking for more than what we need. We are simply asking for something that will meet the islands' current needs and at the same time promote economic growth.

The cost for 5,500 feet would not be \$10 million. That distance would be long enough for hospital planes. Right now, most of the planes belonging to Quebec's health and social services department cannot land on the islands, so it is a health and safety issue. We want these hospital planes to be able to land, something they cannot do at the moment.

Take the example of the C-30s. I have heard it said that these planes can land. However, these are military aircraft. No one on the Magdalen Islands wants to go to war. We would like to have a health and safety service that meets our needs. At the same time, we want to ensure that there is a commercial service that can promote tourism, on which the people of the Magdalen Islands depend entirely during the summer months.

So we are talking about 5,500 feet, not 5,900 feet. I do not want to have Hercules C-30s landing, because I do not want to go to war. I want the hospital planes to be able to land.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Madam Speaker, the question is more or less the same, so the answer will be the same.

We have not received an official request, nor do we have objective information demonstrating real safety needs. As a result, Transport Canada considers that the investment of over \$10 million to extend the runway is not justifiable.

That is my response to the hon. member, but I can assure him that we are open to work with him and his community in order to support the people of the Magdalen Islands.

I would like to thank him for his question.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:59 p.m.)







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