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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 5, 2012
(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 5, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Privacy Commissioner on the application of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act for the year 2011.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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[*English*]

COMBATING TERRORISM ACT

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (for the Minister of Justice) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-7, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Security of Information Act.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present. I am presenting the first as the leader of the official opposition.

[*English*]

I am pleased to rise today to submit a petition on behalf of concerned Canadians who worry that the sale of Zellers to the American retail giant Target will result in the loss of over 5,000 jobs.

The petitioners are dismayed that Target claims to have no obligation to recognize the seniority, wages and benefits of Zellers'

workers. They also know that the loss of these jobs would have a devastating effect on thousands of families and on their communities.

Understanding that the government has repeatedly failed to protect the interest of Canadian jobs, as it is obliged to do under the Investment Canada Act, and seeing the disastrous impact that the foreign takeovers of Alcan, Inco, Falconbridge and Electro-Motive Diesel have had on Canadian jobs and communities all under the government's watch, the petitioners are asking the House to review the sale of Zellers to Target to ensure that jobs, seniority, wages and benefits of Zellers' workers are respected.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to present a petition signed by Canadians who are opposed to the closure of the Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Laboratory, more commonly known as PEARL. Last year, in co-operation with other scientists, researchers from this laboratory discovered the largest hole in the ozone layer ever measured.

Unlike the Conservatives, who refuse to take action on this issue, these Canadians know that climate change is going to have a growing impact on them. They know that the effects of climate change are being felt more strongly in the far north and that PEARL is essential.

This petition demonstrates the Conservatives' contempt for atmospheric sciences. These Canadians are calling for action on climate change and are hoping that PEARL will be saved and that the Conservatives will stop sabotaging our environmental research programs.

The petitioners are asking the federal government to restore funding to the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Science so that PEARL can continue its essential work.

[*English*]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to present a petition signed by many great Canadians from across our great country requesting that the government develop and implement a comprehensive national action plan to combat human trafficking.

Routine Proceedings

AIR CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I table a petition today signed by Canadians in regard to Aveos and the ultimate bankruptcy.

There are thousands of employees who should be working with Air Canada but unfortunately the government has not seen the wisdom of fighting for those jobs and holding Air Canada accountable to legislation. Therefore, those jobs are now in jeopardy. This affects individuals living in Winnipeg, Mississauga, Montreal and the surrounding communities.

The petitioners are calling on the government to hold Air Canada accountable to the Air Canada Public Participation Act, thereby saving these most valuable jobs in our aerospace industry.

WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege and honour to rise this morning to table a petition on behalf of numerous constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country.

These wise folks realize it is time to free our grapes and to allow the archaic 1928 Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act to be amended. They are in support of Bill C-311 by my hard-working colleague from Okanagan—Coquihalla.

Tomorrow we hope to bring this archaic legislation to the 21st century.

PENSIONS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present yet another petition from members of the Vancouver Quadra community and other communities in greater Vancouver.

The petitioners are concerned that the planned delay of retirement benefits, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement, will create hardship for those in our society who have the least now and that it will increase income inequality. Single women will be disproportionately impacted. In fact, over 40% of old age security recipients earn less than \$20,000 a year in retirement. They will be forced to work for two more years or to seek alternative benefits, which would load more costs onto the province.

• (1010)

ABORTION

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition from residents of the Fraser Valley in British Columbia.

The petitioners note that Canada is the only nation in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, without any laws regarding abortion. They point out that the Supreme Court has said that it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the House to speedily enact legislation that would restrict abortion to the greatest extent possible.

SHARK FINNING

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

The first petition is signed by residents within my constituency, residents of Salt Spring Island, who have petitioned this House, as many, I think thousands by now, have before to take action to restrict the practice of shark finning by ending the consumption of shark fins within Canada.

The petitioners call upon the House assembled to ban the possession, distribution or sale of shark fins within Canada understanding that this sole practice is driving the species to extinction.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the second petition I present today is relevant to today, which is World Environment Day, and it is on behalf of residents of Calgary, Guelph, Victoria, Saanichton, Ottawa and Montreal.

The petitioners plead that this House and the government remove all those sections of omnibus budget bill, Bill C-38, that have nothing to do with the budget, remove all sections that relate to degrading the environment and bring forward a bill in the proper form.

* * *

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 questions will be answered today: Nos. 601 and 605.

[Text]

Question No. 601—**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:**

With regard to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP): (a) what were the total net assets of the CPP fund at the end of the three latest fiscal years; (b) for each fiscal year, what portion of these assets was in the form of cash; (c) for each fiscal year, what was the total amount paid out in CPP benefits; (d) when was the latest actuarial assessment of the CPP fund with respect to its capacity to meet anticipated demand for benefits carried out; and (e) when is the next such assessment planned?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), as reported in the annual reports of the Canada pension plan, CPP, the CPP's assets available for benefit payments as at March 31, 2011, were valued at \$151.6 billion; at March 31, 2010, they were valued at \$131.4 billion; and at March 31, 2009, they were valued at \$110.0 billion.

With regard to (b), the CPP's consolidated financial statements are included in the public accounts and published in the annual reports of the CPP. The cash balances reported in the CPP's consolidated financial statements consist of the total cash held by the CPP account and the CPP Investment Board, the CPPIB.

As at March 31, 2011, the deposit with the Receiver General for Canada in the CPP account was \$23 million and CPPIB's cash was \$11 million, for a total of \$34 million in the consolidated statement of financial position and the consolidated statement of cash flow.

Routine Proceedings

As at March 31, 2010, the deposit with the Receiver General for Canada in the CPP account was \$175 million and CPPIB's cash was \$5 million, for a total of \$180 million in the consolidated statement of net assets and the consolidated statement of cash flow.

As at March 31, 2009, the deposit with the Receiver General for Canada in the CPP account was \$90 million and CPIB's cash was \$5 million, for a total of \$95 million in the consolidated statement of net assets and the consolidated statement of cash flow.

With regard to (c), according to the annual reports of the CPP, for fiscal year 2010–11, approximately \$31.6 billion were paid in benefits; for 2009–10, approximately \$30.4 billion were paid in benefits; and for 2008–09, approximately \$29 billion were paid in benefits.

With regard to (d), the 25th actuarial report on the Canada pension plan was tabled in the House of Commons on November 15, 2010. The report presents the financial status of the CPP as at December 31, 2009. According to the report, the CPP is expected to meet its obligations and remain financially sustainable over the long term under a contribution rate of 9.9%.

The Chief Actuary is required under the legislation to produce an actuarial report on the CPP every three years. The CPP legislation also requires that the Chief Actuary prepare an actuarial report any time a bill is introduced in Parliament that has, in the view of the Chief Actuary, a material impact on the estimates in the most recent triennial actuarial report. This reporting ensures that the long-term financial implications of proposed plan changes are given timely consideration by the Minister of Finance.

With regard to (e), the next actuarial report is expected to be tabled before Parliament in the fall of 2013. It will present the financial status of the plan as at December 31, 2012.

Question No. 605—Mr. Glenn Thibeault:

With regard to the government's expenditures related to travel arranged by Cabinet Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries on March 30, 2012, to promote Budget 2012, what was the total amount spent, for each member of Cabinet and their staff, on (i) travel expenses, (ii) hospitality expenses, (iii) accommodation, (iv) alcohol, (v) beverages, (vi) food?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these expenses will be made available according to proactive disclosure guidelines. When posted, they can be found at <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pd-dp/gr-rg/index-eng.asp>.

* * *

[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 Questions Nos. 589, 590, 591, 594, 597, 598, 600, 602 and 604 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 589—Hon. Irwin Cotler:

For each year from 2000 up to and including 2011, and for each country from which Canada has received claims for refugee protection from 2000 up to and including 2011: (a) how many claims for refugee protection from each country were made each year indicated; (b) how many claims for refugee protection from each country received a final decision from the Refugee Protection Division for each year indicated; (c) for each country, what is the rate, expressed as a percentage, that is obtained by dividing the total number of claims made by nationals of the country in question that, in a final determination by the Division for each year indicated, were rejected, determined to be withdrawn or abandoned by the total number of claims made by nationals of the country in question; and (d) for each country, what is the rate, expressed as a percentage, that is obtained by dividing the total number of claims made by nationals of the country in question that, in a final determination by the Division, for each indicated year, are determined to be withdrawn or abandoned by the total number of claims made by nationals of the country in question?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 590—Hon. Irwin Cotler:

With respect to Federal Skilled Worker applicants who applied before February 27, 2008, and for whom an immigration officer has not made a decision based on selection criteria by March 29, 2012: (a) how many total such applicants are there; (b) how many such persons indicated (i) French as their first language, (ii) French as their language of preference for communications with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), (iii) English as their first language, (iv) English as their language of preference for communications with CIC; (c) how many such persons have completed a post-secondary education; (d) how many such persons reside in (i) the province of Quebec, (ii) the province of Ontario, (iii) the province of Nova Scotia, (iv) the province of New Brunswick, (v) the province of Prince Edward Island, (vi) the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, (vii) the province of Manitoba, (viii) the province of Alberta, (ix) the province of Saskatchewan, (x) the province of British Columbia, (xi) Nunavut, (xii) Yukon, (xiii) the Northwest Territories; (e) how many such persons indicated an intent to reside in (i) the province of Quebec, (ii) the province of Ontario, (iii) the province of Nova Scotia, (iv) the province of New Brunswick, (v) the province of Prince Edward Island, (vi) the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, (vii) the province of Manitoba, (viii) the province of Alberta, (ix) the province of Saskatchewan, (x) the province of British Columbia, (xi) Nunavut, (xii) Yukon, (xiii) the Northwest Territories; (f) how many such persons reside in Montreal; (g) how many such persons indicated an intent to reside in Montreal; (h) how many such persons reside in the riding of Mount Royal; (i) how many such persons indicated an intent to reside in the riding of Mount Royal; (j) with respect to the persons in (d)(i) and (e)(i), (i) how many indicated French as their first language or language of preference for communications with CIC, (ii) how many possess a post-secondary degree; (k) with respect to the persons in (h) and (i), (i) how many indicated French as their first language or language of preference for communications with CIC, (ii) how many possess a post-secondary degree; (l) with respect to the persons in (f) and (g), (i) how many indicated French as their first language or language of preference for communications with CIC, (ii) how many possess a post-secondary degree; (m) with respect to the persons in (h) and (i), what are the countries of origin of the applicants, broken down by the number of applicants per country; (n) with respect to the persons in (f) and (g), what are the countries of origin of the applicants, broken down by the number of applicants per country; (o) with respect to the persons in (f) and (g), what occupations were indicated by applicants, broken down by the number of applicants for each identified occupation; and (p) with respect to the persons in (h) and (i), what occupations were indicated by applicants, broken down by the number of applicants for each identified occupation?

(Return tabled)

Routine Proceedings

Question No. 591—Hon. Irwin Cotler:

With regard to the current Canadian policy on providing information to foreign agencies and using information from foreign agencies for the combating of terrorism and the protection of public safety: (a) what is the current policy on providing information to foreign agencies when there is a substantial risk this may lead to acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; (b) which departments contributed to the formation of the policy referred to in (a); (c) how long has the policy referred to in (a) been in place; (d) which external experts, including academics, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO), private sector representatives, were consulted in the formation of the policy referred to in (a); (e) what was the role of the Minister of Public Safety in the formation of the policy referred to in (a); (f) what was the role of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the formation of the policy referred to in (a); (g) which official is ultimately responsible for determining whether “substantial risk” exists, in reference to (a); (h) who is responsible for deciding to which foreign agencies Canada will provide information, and what are the substantive criteria behind such a decision; (i) when deliberating the decision referred to in (h), are the “concluding observations” of United Nations Committee Against Torture reports consulted; (j) what sources are used by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the RCMP or government officials in considering the human rights records of foreign agencies concerning domestic and international activities, including the treatment and interrogation of detainees; (k) what follow-up procedures are used to verify that information transferred from Canada to foreign agencies does not lead to the commission of acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; (l) what is the current policy on the use of information obtained by CSIS from foreign agencies when there are suspicions such information was obtained using acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; (m) which departments contributed to the formation of the current policy referred to in (l); (n) how long has the policy referred to in (l) been in place; (o) which external experts, including academics, NGO representatives, private sector representatives, were consulted in the formation of the policy referred to in (l); and (p) what was the role of the Minister of Public Safety in the formation of the policy referred to in (l)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 594—Hon. Scott Brison:

With regard to Budget 2012: (a) what is the breakdown of each portfolio’s review base in Table 5.1 by department, agency and organization; (b) where the full budget of the department, agency, or organization is not included in the calculation of a portfolio’s review base in Table 5.1, (i) which components of that department, agency, or organization are included in that review base and which are not, (ii) for those components included in the review base, what is the breakdown of their funding by vote or statutory authority; (c) what is the breakdown of expected savings in Table 6.7 under Budget 2012 reductions in departmental spending, for each department, agency and organization in each of the fiscal years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and ongoing; and (d) how does the answer to (c) for each department, agency and organization reconcile with the annual breakdowns included in Annex 1 of Budget 2012?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 597—Mr. David McGuinty:

With regard to Old Age Security: (a) has Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) or any other department undertaken new estimates since 2009 of the number of people over the age of 65 who are not receiving their OAS pension despite being eligible for it, and, if so, what are those estimates; (b) has HRSDC or any other department undertaken new estimates of the number of people aged 60-64 who are not receiving their OAS Spouse’s Allowance despite being eligible for it, and, if so, what are those estimates; (c) Has HRSDC or any other department undertaken new estimates of the number of people aged 60-64 who are not receiving their OAS Survivor’s Allowance despite being eligible for it, and, if so, what are those estimates; (d) how many of the people included in the estimates referred to in (a), (b) or (c) are currently in receipt of benefits under the Canada Pension Plan; (e) what outreach activities or initiatives has HRSDC, Service Canada or any other department undertaken to notify eligible seniors who are not currently in receipt of OAS pension, Spouse’s Allowance or Survivor’s Allowance; (f) has HRSDC, Service Canada or any other department undertaken any notifications by mail to eligible seniors who are not currently in receipt of OAS pension, Spouse’s Allowance or Survivor’s Allowance; and (g) if the answer to (f) is affirmative, (i) in what years were letters mailed, (ii) how many were sent in each of those years, (iii) what was the response rate in each of those years?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 598—Mr. David McGuinty:

With respect to Treasury Board numbers for public sector employees as of March 31, 2012: (a) what is the number of public sector employees broken down by the following regions for the fiscal years ending March 31, 2009, March 31, 2010, March 31, 2011, and March 31, 2012, namely: (i) Newfoundland and Labrador, (ii) Prince Edward Island, (iii) Nova Scotia, (iv) New Brunswick, (v) Quebec, exclusive of the National Capital Region, (vi) National capital Region, Quebec portion, (vii) National Capital Region, Ontario portion, (viii) Ontario, exclusive of the National Capital Region, (ix) Manitoba, (x) Saskatchewan, (xi) Alberta, (xii) British Columbia, (xiii) Yukon, (xiv) Northwest Territories, (xv) Nunavut, (xvi) outside Canada; and (b) for the answers in (a), what are the numbers in each region broken down by (i) indeterminate employees, (ii) specified term employees, (iii) casual employees, (iv) student employees?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 600—Mr. David McGuinty:

With regard to government offices, how many offices have been newly opened or relocated since January 1, 2006, specifying: (a) the department or agency; (b) the division, unit, or other like descriptor; (c) in the case of relocated offices, the former location, including full address; (d) the location of the newly-opened or relocated office, including full address; and (e) in the case of leased space, the name of the firm or person leasing the space to the government?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 602—Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:

With regard to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP): (a) in the past five years, have officials at the CPP, Finance Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat or Human Resources and Skills Development Canada performed any assessment or estimate of the cost of making changes to the limitation on benefits paid retroactive from the date of application; (b) if the answer to (a) is affirmative, (i) what were the resulting assessments or estimates, (ii) what are the file or reference numbers of these assessments; (c) has any assessment or estimate been made of the cost of matching the Quebec Pension Plan’s policy of making retroactive payments for up to 60 months; (d) if the answer to (c) is affirmative, (i) what were the resulting assessments or estimates, (ii) what are the file or reference numbers of these assessments; (e) has any assessment or estimate been made of the cost of removing the limitation altogether, and allowing applicants to receive payment for all retroactive benefits; (f) if the answer to (e) is affirmative, (i) what were the resulting assessments or estimates, (ii) what are the file or reference numbers of these assessments; and (g) was any evaluation made about the impact of each option examined as per (a), (c), and (e) on the actuarial soundness of the CPP?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 604—Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:

With regard to the Canada Pension Plan: (a) Has Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) undertaken new estimates since 2005 of the number of people over the age of 70 who paid into the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), who might still be alive, but who were not in receipt of their CPP retirement benefits; (b) how many people over the age of 70 years and believed still alive are estimated to be currently missing out on their CPP retirement benefits, (c) how many of the people in (b) are currently in receipt of (i) survivor benefits, (ii) Old Age Pension, (iii) the Guaranteed Income Supplement; (d) since February 2006, (i) what outreach activities or initiatives has HRSDC or Service Canada undertaken to notify eligible seniors over the age of 70 who are not currently in receipt of their CPP retirement benefits, (ii) what are the costs of those activities; (e) since February 2006, has HRSDC or Service Canada undertaken any notifications by mail to eligible seniors over the age of 70 who are not currently in receipt of their CPP retirement benefits; and (f) if the answer to (e) is affirmative, (i) in what years were letters mailed, (ii) how many were sent in each of those years, (iii) what was the response rate in each of those years?

(Return tabled)

Business of Supply

[English]

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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EXPERTISE

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian scientific and social science expertise is of great value and, therefore, the House calls on the Government to end its muzzling of scientists; to reverse the cuts to research programs at Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Library and Archives Canada, National Research Council Canada, Statistics Canada, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada; and to cancel the closures of the National Council of Welfare and the First Nations Statistical Institute.

He said: Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the diligent and very hard-working official opposition industry critic from LaSalle—Émard.

I rise today to introduce our official opposition day motion. We in the NDP believe the scientific approach to knowledge is something we should cherish and rigorously defend. This opposition day motion stresses action to counteract the ways in which this approach is being actively undermined by the Conservatives.

While my colleagues will speak to the specifics and give real world examples throughout the day, in my short time I will speak to why we should value and defend the scientific approach to learning and acquiring knowledge.

Whether it is in the hard sciences, such as chemistry, physics or biology, or the social sciences, such as political science or economics, scholars around the world apply a universal approach to understanding humanity and its problems. This involves first asking important questions. These questions are sometimes driven by the needs of society, but they are sometimes driven by dreaming. However, they are always driven by the researchers' own curiosity. Wanting to know what is within and what is beyond is what drives researchers.

Therefore, whether it is the force for change in society or the force of colliding atoms, scientists begin by first identifying the important “why” question, why something is occurring, identifying problems and asking why it is happening.

After asking the “why” question, researchers form theories and then gather data to test these theories. However, most important, they truthfully report test results and the methodology by which these results were obtained.

All those who believe in science and the scientific approach are driven to seek and report the truth and, if these truths are unpopular, it is imperative upon the researcher to speak truth to power. Where we get into real trouble is when those with power do not want to hear

the truth and try to undermine or suppress these truths. Of course, the most famous example of this clash between truth and power occurred during the birth of modern science when Galileo was imprisoned for life for daring to suggest that the earth revolves around the sun.

Three and a half centuries later, we find ourselves facing the same underlying problem where those who believe in science are threatened by those following ideological doctrine. With their cuts and muzzling of scientists, the Conservatives attack our hard-won culture of scientific inquiry. Worse still, they are creating an atmosphere of fear among Canadian scientists. They give Canadian scientists a reason to fear. These scientists shake their heads in disbelief and think to themselves, “I never thought it would happen in this day and age and certainly not in this country”.

I have had the great pleasure of working in academic institutions for the greater part of the last two decades and I have recently been in touch with many of these scientists. I can tell members that there is an atmosphere of fear that is pervading Canada and it is spreading among Canadian academic institutions. I have been hearing from tenured professors who, for example, fear what is coming next. They have told me stories of colleagues who have been warned against speaking out and that their programs would be cut as retribution if they make their fears known, or if they move from science to become politically active and speak out against the massive change in culture that the Conservatives are bringing with their recent legislation.

However, many scientists are taking the risk and making public their concerns. For example, yesterday I received a letter from 12 prominent members of the scientific community, and I mean prominent. Deans, chairs, program directors and many senior scientists were of these 12 who stated that they were “...deeply concerned by the erosion of funding for fundamental scientific research in Canada”.

•(1015)

In this letter, the scientists list three major programs for which they are particularly concerned. The first is the cancellation of the major resources support program, the MRS program; the second is the research tools and instruments program, the RTI program; and the third, very troubling, is that these 12 prominent members of the scientific community state that there is a 50% reduction in the number of NSERC graduate and post-doctoral scholarships. This cuts at the heart of our approach to learning and discovery in this country, and they are deeply concerned.

These scientists see these cuts as undermining Canada's long-standing commitment to basic science and fundamental scientific learning. These eminent scientists argue that the Conservatives are creating “a 'perfect storm' that will jeopardize Canada's international reputation and competitive edge...”.

The letter concludes that the scientists “welcome the opportunity to work with NSERC to find alternative measures”. However, as is the case with so many other measures taken by the government, there is little or no opportunity for the public to provide input in the decision-making process and, of course, there is no difference here.

Business of Supply

I also have a similar letter from 47 other top-grade scientists describing their pride in what they and their colleagues have accomplished and hope to accomplish in the coming years. I have made an effort to personally speak with these 47 scientists, and in these private conversations they have described to me how they and their lives are filled with an intense sense of purpose, how they wade through the setbacks and failures of experiments with resilience and spend long hours in Arctic labs or even in howling winds day after day because their desire for truth and knowledge keeps them there.

They also expressed to me their sheer joy of passing their knowledge to younger generations. Training the next wave of great scientists will employ this scientific approach to knowledge, and key to this training is bringing students into Canadian labs and research centres in order to provide hands-on training and first-hand experience.

However, instead of being secure in the knowledge that robust and reliable funding programs are in place to support the freedom to innovate and advance knowledge in its variety of forms, they now have to wonder whether they are being unfairly targeted because their life work no longer constitutes what the government deems is worth supporting. Across the country, they are asking why and beginning to mobilize. As someone who has spent almost 20 years undertaking academic study and working in universities, I have never before encountered this kind of mobilization of scientists. To see letters signed by so many prominent biologists, physicists and chemists makes me think there is something very wrong in the government's approach to funding and learning in this country.

This opposition day motion is meant to express the NDP's intent to stand with scientists and social scientists and show that we on this side of the House are their allies. We pledge to listen to the fears and fight for academic freedom, because when scientists succeed, they show Canadians and the world what is possible.

Here in the House we hear the attacks every day. Members of the government on the front bench sneer when I say the word "academic". They refuse to acknowledge the value of Statistics Canada research. They openly chastise the environment commissioner's citing of scientific evidence and refuse to let government scientists speak at conferences, but scientists should not have to subject the product of their work to political tests of faith from the regime of the day. The evaluation and examination of the true value of their work must remain with the review of their peers.

I am a strong adherent of the Haldane principle, which simply states that research funding decisions should be made by researchers, not politicians. Conservatives have tried to bury their attacks within this Trojan Horse budget. They have sought to suppress some of the brightest voices in this country here at home and on the world stage. In fact, I can say that they have declared a war on knowledge, and Canadians are caught in the crossfire.

I call on my colleagues opposite to join New Democrats and support the scientists, researchers and others who will be adversely affected by these cuts in their own constituencies, and to support our motion.

● (1020)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for South-

ern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's speech. I know he was not here for the previous budgets this government brought forward, but I can tell him that we have increased our investments in science and technology all across the board, from basic, pure fundamental research—like the Perimeter Institute, like the Institute for Quantum Computing and many others—all the way through to applied research, yet at every opportunity that we have increased investments, the NDP has voted against those initiatives.

It is one thing for the member to stand and say that the NDP supports scientists, but the actions of the NDP seem to indicate that it does not. I know New Democrats think natural resources are a disease. Perhaps they also think that science and students are also a disease, because they vote no. Would he care to respond to that truth?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, of course this is a disingenuous question.

The government buries its cuts in these giant omnibus bills and then blames us for not voting for them, but how could we support such a budget in which so many cuts to science and attacks on fundamental knowledge are buried within?

I would challenge this member to break apart those pieces of legislation from the omnibus bill and allow us to discuss them separately, and of course then the scientists' voices would really be heard.

● (1025)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for introducing the motion today. I would like to ask him a question about his question, which is why scientists like to ask the question "Why?". It is on the issue of drug shortages.

In the United States, the Senate passed Bill S.3187, in which they decided to study the correlations between drug shortages and factors such as the number of manufacturers, the pricing structure and the contracting practices, while here in Canada we seem to be content to simply set up a website where people can track what drugs are in shortage and we do not seem to be interested in thinking about and investigating the root cause.

I would ask my hon. colleague to comment on the government's performance on this issue with regard to asking the question of why.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, of course I recognize the member's great training at Princeton University. My colleague's point outlines what is happening in general here in Canada, which is that in other countries where scientists are allowed to pursue their craft with state sponsorship, they again respect the Haldane principle whereby scientists are the ones who decide which projects are funded.

The Conservatives are moving away from that principle. They are deciding the questions, and when they get answers they do not like, they either cut the funding or muzzle scientists so that the truth does not come out.

I thank the member for his question. I respect his judgments and opinions.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He spoke specifically about the muzzling of scientists that is going on. I would like to remind the House that, since this Parliament began, this government has shut down debate many times, and its gag orders have extended beyond these walls.

I am extremely concerned because men and women, and more specifically our democracy, are being silenced.

My colleague met with agencies and scientists who told him about the direct impact of this muzzling on competitiveness. What are the direct consequences of muzzling these experts for Canada's competitiveness?

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, there is a direct and indirect effect of this muzzling, first of all, where we have kind of government flak sitting beside scientists at conferences telling them what they can and cannot say, we have a direct muzzling. Of course, we have an indirect muzzling where the colleagues who I have spoken to and members of the scientific community are now fearful of what they can and cannot say because they are worried about cuts to their own funding and the impacts that will have on Canadians in the future.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, the decisions of legislators must be based on thorough and objective data.

Parliament Hill is a special place. Since I became an MP, and as the science and technology critic for the first year of my mandate, then as the industry critic, I have had the opportunity to meet with stakeholders in academia, government, industry and science. I have also attended conferences and participated in symposia and panels. In the past year, I have learned a great deal, and that has been very rewarding. As parliamentarians, we have access to a multitude of voices and points of view, as well as invaluable knowledge. It would be of no help to Canadians to close our eyes and ears.

It is my responsibility and my duty, as a parliamentarian, to take into account the point of view of researchers and scientists in order to make informed decisions. Canada and the Canadian government are full of these people who are passionate about research. For years, with patience, perseverance and know-how, they have helped us better understand the demographic evolution and the state of our environment and economy; they help us grasp what is going on. And then it is up to us, as parliamentarians, to propose evidence-based legislation and policy, with full knowledge of the facts.

I do not understand why a government would want to silence these voices. I do not understand why this government continues to censor scientists and undermine the work of Statistics Canada. Ottawa has to stop muzzling scientists, start basing its decisions on scientific evidence and get to work on repairing Canada's reputation as an open and enlightened society.

In Davos, the Prime Minister promised that innovation would be the cornerstone of Canada's future. How can he talk about innovation

when he is not open to debating ideas? Ideas are the genesis of innovation.

Since coming to power, this government has been on a veritable crusade against any policy based on scientific evidence. The government tends to cast aspersions on any research or any agency that contradicts its ideological agenda.

We have here a government that has made censoring researchers central to its science policy. Everyone is now aware of the controversy surrounding internationally renowned scientists and researchers, such as David Tarasick, whom this government muzzled because he knew that its inaction on climate change would be disastrous to our environment. Mr. Tarasick had published the results of his research in the British journal *Nature*. The government also banned researcher Kristi Miller from talking to the media about her research on the diseases threatening Pacific salmon.

The prize definitely goes to the censorship of Scott Dallimore, a scientist at Natural Resources Canada. The research that Dr. Dallimore had published in *Nature* was on the impact of climate change on our country's north. These findings would have been quite disconcerting to the government, which was probably already planning to withdraw Canada from the Kyoto protocol. However, there was no need to be concerned, because Dr. Dallimore was talking about the climate change that occurred 13,000 years ago.

● (1030)

[English]

Censorship is at the heart of the science policy of the government. Last February I attended the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science with more than 6,000 scientists and specialists from 50 different countries. One of the conferences was titled "Unmuzzle Government Scientists" to denounce the muzzling of government researchers. I had the honour of representing the NDP at the conference. I met scientists, experts, engineers, mathematicians, physicists and science journalists.

Our scientific community is worried and it is fully aware of the climate change caused by human activities. It proposed innovative solutions to address the biggest challenge faced by humanity at this time.

Once the ribbon cutting to officially open the conference was done, none of the members of Parliament were present, not even the Minister of State for Science and Technology.

Nature magazine took note of the crusade the Conservatives have undertaken to undermine science-based information decision making. In an editorial, *Nature* magazine denounced the censorship by the government on the scientific community saying, "Canada's generally positive foreign reputation as a progressive, scientific nation masks some startlingly poor behaviour."

The way forward is clear. It is time for the Canadian government to set its scientists free.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

For this government, a policy in favour of innovation also means eliminating Statistics Canada's long form census and \$8.3 billion in cuts. These cuts will total \$33.9 billion by 2014-15.

The Conservative government's decisions have proven lethal to Statistics Canada and its activities. In other words, in the middle of a demographic crisis, without the long form, a census of the Canadian population will not paint an accurate picture of that population. How can we propose sound legislation if we do not know what Canadians need? How can we keep an eye on demographic trends and trends in health, the economy and services to the public?

These decisions—like many other government decisions—to slash government sources of information and research and to undermine the knowledge-based decision-making process have been universally criticized.

At the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, during a study on e-commerce in Canada, witnesses condemned the fact that Canada did not have any recent data to compare Canadians' online shopping habits with other countries or any studies on how small and medium-sized businesses use e-commerce. This is because the Survey of Electronic Commerce and Technology has been eliminated by the government's budget cuts.

Critical up-to-date information was missing, preventing the committee from doing a thorough and enlightened job. Our researchers and scientists know full well that, if we, as a country, do not use their knowledge and research, the whole nation will pay the price. These Government of Canada professionals are serving the public because they are committed to their mission of serving the country. They are an invaluable source of information for parliamentarians and all Canadians. They help us to better understand our world, and they can enlighten us on how to find solutions that will help us meet the challenges of today and of tomorrow.

In response to those challenges, the NDP is proposing practical solutions to encourage dialogue with our scientists and to ensure that we have the tools we need to make well-informed decisions in the true interest of Canadians.

I therefore call on the Prime Minister to adopt guidelines on scientific communications similar to those adopted in the United States. I also ask the government to reinstate Statistics Canada's long form census. A number of organizations, including the Canadian Science Writers' Association and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, have asked the government to adopt guidelines.

I call on the government to reinstate the long form census in Canada.

• (1035)

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, it seems to me that perhaps one thing that the opposition is not clear on is that the decisions to fund science all across this country are made by independent

councils, scientists and peer review panels. Scientists make the decision as to who gets funding and who does not.

In the case of MRS for example, that was a decision that was made by the council. The government, politicians, we stay separate from telling scientists what they can and cannot do.

Is the opposition suggesting we change that policy and disallow the scientific peer review process and let government officials make these decisions? I do not agree with that. Is that what the member is suggesting?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, in my proposals, I suggest that the voices of scientists be heard within the government and that we open the door to make sure that there is real dialogue between parliamentarians and scientists. That is the main objective of the motion.

I also hope that the government will bear in mind that the cuts within various departments, particularly to research and monitoring, will have a significant impact in the long term.

• (1040)

[English]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Madam Speaker, as a scientist myself, I am very concerned about cuts to things like the Experimental Lakes Area, marine research, atmospheric research, especially climate research, and the anti-science attitude of the government.

The Conference Board of Canada has rated Canada 14 out of the 17 countries it examined. It gave Canada a D in innovation. That is our Conference Board of Canada. A key element in innovation is basic science research.

Does the hon. member share my concerns about the anti-science attitude of the government and that bad grade from The Conference Board of Canada? Would she like to add to my concerns?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, to properly understand innovation and the entire innovation chain, we must understand that the major innovations and achievements we benefit from today, in the comfort of our own homes, have come out of fundamental research. This involves making a commitment to the research process without exactly knowing what the results and applications will be. With a long-term vision, there will be long-term benefits for society.

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Madam Speaker, to illustrate this situation, I will say that this reminds me of a time in the 1940s when a famous government decided to burn books to try to control information. I believe it is a matter of trust. It is more a comment than a question that I have.

Scientists are always portrayed as mechanical and robotic individuals who are driven by data. I believe that these are people I can trust.

Business of Supply

These are my cousins, brothers, sisters and parents who get up every day to ensure that their children have a better future. The put on their rubber boots to collect data in regions that are sometimes very dangerous, where no one else would dare go.

These are Canadian citizens who vote and want the best for our future. These are the people being muzzled. The government is destroying trust in our society, for reasons that are completely beyond me.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, scientists inform us about the state of our planet and our environment. These are the people who collect and interpret data to give us a privileged view of both nature and the nature of our society.

This information and these voices are very important in helping us better understand what is going on in our society, in terms of the challenges we will face and how we can do so with sensible policies, based on objective scientific data.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today in the House with great pride as Minister of State for Science and Technology and as the member of Parliament for Cambridge and North Dumfries. I am here to speak on our government's strong support for science, technology and research.

Our government understands clearly that Canada's long-term economic competitiveness depends on supporting science, technology and innovation that will drive the growth of jobs, the growth of our economy and long-term prosperity for our citizens. It has been a fundamental priority of our government since we took office in 2006, including with the introduction of the science and technology strategy in 2007.

Over the past five years, our government has been implementing that strategy significantly and with commitment. It has provided nearly \$8 billion in additional, new investments in Canadian talent, world-class research excellence, and the linkages between knowledge and the capacity to innovate in a global economy. Federal science and technology expenditures reached \$11.3 billion in 2011-12, more than double the year before we took office. That is a significant increase by any imagination.

These investments have helped drive Canadian leadership in research, science and technology, and enhanced the ability to turn ideas into social and economic benefits for Canadians. Indeed, according to the Science, Technology and Innovation Council's "State of the Nation" report published in June 2011, Canada ranks first among all the G7 countries for higher education and research, and Canada's scientists perform at a world-class level.

OECD data notes that Canada produces 2.7% of the world's scientific output and 6.8% of the world's top cited research papers. Getting that scientific data out there at this level means that we are punching well above our weight, especially given that Canada accounts for only half a percent of the world's population. I would also note that Canada ranks first among the OECD countries for its share of working-age population with college and university degrees.

We have systematically enhanced federal support for advanced research. We are promoting partnerships between industry and academia through our three federal granting councils, namely the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

We are supporting research in human health and genomics technology through Genome Canada as well as studies to improve patient outcomes and cost-effectiveness of health care. We are promoting the development of alternative technologies for producing medical isotopes and linking Canadian researchers to the world through the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.

Moreover, we are providing significant support for leading-edge research infrastructure. Two budgets ago, the investment made in the Canada Foundation for Innovation was three-quarters of a billion dollars and in this budget it is half a billion dollars. We are investing in Canada's ultra high-speed research network CANARIE, satellite data reception facilities, Canada's continued participation in the international space station mission and the Canadian High Arctic Research Station. As well, we are supporting key activities in fisheries, agriculture and environmental sciences.

Beyond this, our government is also investing in institutions that are pushing the frontier of pure, basic knowledge and research. I am talking about the Institute for Quantum Computing and the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, which leveraged significant private sector money for their work that is going to benefit not only Canada but all the nations around the world.

● (1045)

Canada's history of discovery, I am very pleased to say, tells us that we play an important role on the world stage through research and development. From the pacemaker to Canadarm to the first mass market smart phone, Canadian entrepreneurs, researchers and businesses have made their mark time and again and proven they can be world-class innovators.

Our government is committed to helping these types of breakthroughs happen. We know Canadians want results for their investments. This means bringing innovative products and processes to the marketplace, which of course will in turn create high-quality, high-paying jobs, economic growth, long-term prosperity and, indeed, a better quality of life for Canadians.

However, we also know that competition remains fierce. The pace of technological change is lightning quick, and it is happening in both developed and emerging economies. This means that to ensure Canada's long-term economic competitiveness, we must create and nurture globally competitive businesses that do research, develop that research, innovate and create those high-quality jobs.

Business of Supply

Beyond our borders, no one would be surprised if I said the global economic growth remains quite tentative and fragile. Any potential setbacks would have a negative impact on Canada. Canadian businesses face ever-increasing competition, not just from the emerging countries and the speed of technological advancement but also because of realities associated with our aging population and demographic shifts.

Now as a world leader in post-secondary research with a highly skilled workforce, Canada has some very strong fundamentals for innovation. Where we can do better is in our support of business expenditures on research and development. Canada continues to lag behind other peer nations in this sense. We are number one in a number of ways, but where we are not number one is in this particular area.

That is exactly why, with so many generous incentive programs for business research, we asked an expert panel led by Mr. Tom Jenkins to review all the federal investments in this area and provide advice on how we could optimize this expenditure of tax dollars.

Now through the response of this expert panel this particular budget, economic action plan 2012, takes a huge step forward at creating a comprehensive and forward-looking agenda that will deliver high-quality jobs, economic growth and sound public finances.

It builds on our positive record of achievement to help further unleash the potential of Canadian scientists, Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in a modern economy to the benefit of all Canadians.

By focusing on the drivers of growth and job creation, which clearly are innovation, investments, education, skills and training and healthy communities, we will solidify, strengthen and draw upon the entrepreneurial sector's role as the driving force behind Canada's economy.

Economic action plan proposes a new approach to federal support for innovation, including \$67 million new dollars to the National Research Council to refocus this council and all its efforts and its expertise towards business-driven industry-relevant applied research. This refocused NRC will help more Canadian businesses commercialize and develop innovative products and services.

We intend to build on a proven approach that we have seen used by global innovation players, carefully adapted and modified to the Canadian reality. The government's new approach also increases direct support for innovation and research by doubling the research and development assistance from the NRC's industrial research and assistance program.

Furthermore, our new approach in this budget supports innovation through procurement by connecting Canadian companies with federal departments and agencies to build their capacity to again compete in the global marketplace. We go on. This approach also seeks to help our high-growth firms to access risk capital by committing \$400 million to leverage private sector investments in early venture capital stages.

● (1050)

It would support, indeed, private and public research collaboration through more internships for graduate students and funding of business-led research and development networks.

It would streamline the SR and ED tax incentive program and, as always, reinvest any savings in other support programs that would reinforce innovation in Canada.

These important measures would be aimed at building our innovation economy and driving improved competitiveness and prosperity for the betterment of all Canadians as we move into the future.

I will turn to a different topic. That is this government's ongoing support and commitment to basic science. The notion that the government is abandoning basic research is yet another fearmongering tactic by the opposition, which is irresponsible. The notion is completely false. I want to repeat that. Even someone with minimal mathematics would see that our increases show our commitment.

Through budget 2012, our government would build, yet again, on earlier investments by proposing significant new resources to the Canada Foundation for Innovation, half a billion dollars to support advanced research and leading-edge scientific infrastructure in universities, colleges, research hospitals and other not-for-profit research institutions all across Canada. This funding would play a crucial role in attracting and retaining the world's top minds, training the next generation of researchers and, of course, driving cutting-edge research.

As well, it is important to hear that Canada's economic plan, our budget that is before the House right now, would also commit a new \$37 million annually to the three granting councils to enhance their support for research partnerships between industry and academia. Support for core granting council programs in support of discovery research and support for students would all be maintained. To suggest there would be a decrease is, again, false. In fact, I can tell this House that this would mean, on average, more than a 20% increase for the granting councils since we have taken office.

In terms of other investments made in budget 2012, we would also provide new funding for research in human health and genomics technologies through an enormous amount of support to Genome Canada.

We have invested heavily in research infrastructure at Canada's post-secondary institutions. This came out in budget 2009, which was also voted against by the NDP. In that budget, we provided \$2 billion for research and advanced learning infrastructure at universities and colleges. Laboratories and all kinds of new state-of-the-art equipment would come from the three-quarters of a billion dollars I mentioned earlier, through CFI.

Business of Supply

Now, the good news here is that this funding was leveraged by the provinces and other private individuals, the colleges and universities, and ended up being about \$5 billion in support of rebuilding our research capacity all across our nation, which we need to attract and retain the brightest minds the planet has to offer.

The government is maintaining Canada's position as a world-leading supporter of research while strengthening one area that needs to be improved, results-driven applied research and development.

In doing so, this absolutely does not mean we are stepping back from our commitment in any other area. In fact, this is Canada. We can do more than one thing at a time. I believe firmly that our government can fund research across the board, as we have shown consistently, consecutively in every single budget. It is support for the basic, the applied, and all the way through to commercialization and marketization, getting those ideas out of the minds of our scientists, through our laboratories, on to our factory floors and into the living rooms and hospitals of the world. That is exactly what our government is doing.

•(1055)

Since coming to office, we have also introduced significant new investments in other areas. We have turned around Canada's brain drain and now have a brain gain. We have introduced such brilliant initiatives as the Banting post-doctoral fellowships program, the Vanier Canada graduate scholarships program and the Canada excellence research chairs program, attracting world-class talent and teams that have come to Canada to do their research.

We recognize also the importance of science and technology in forming public policies. That is exactly why the government, all the time, seeks the opinions from our scientists, through various independent as well as published scientific advice forums and a variety of sources. For instance, we have sustained the Council of Canadian Academies with a \$30 million grant. The CCA conducts independent science-based assessments drawing together panels of experts to inform us on public policy initiatives. To date, the council has published 11 different science-based assessments on issues of importance to Canada and our citizens. Through the CCA and other bodies such as the Science, Technology and Innovation Council, the Government of Canada demonstrates its commitment to independent science and its crucial role in informing decision making.

Within the federal government, our scientists play an important role in informing policy decisions, assisting the enforcement of regulations and facilitating program delivery. Indeed, the multi-dimensional contribution of government science is critical to good governance. Federal scientists here in Canada are among the best in the world. These public officials are encouraged to publish regularly in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and many of them do just that.

Federally funded scientific knowledge is also shared directly with the public through other means. For example, science-based departments and agencies regularly produce accessible publications, highlighting research activities and findings. Second, public portals are available, such as science.gc.ca. It is a website we have developed to communicate information on federal science directly to Canadians.

I am very proud that our scientists participate in conferences and lectures all around the world. They are sought after for their expertise and innovations and they give thousands of interviews every year.

I must reiterate that funding for core federal granting councils aimed at supporting discovery-driven research is continuing. Our history supports that; our future will see that. We are also supporting student scholarship programs. Moreover, 2012-13 savings realized from operational efficiencies, or from reallocated funding from lower priority programs, are being fully reinvested back into granting councils' activities that they deem will help strengthen their activities.

We will ensure continued and growing funding for the programs and services that are priorities for Canadians. Economic action plan 2012 makes a wide range of important investments that bear witness to that commitment. These actions will yield real dividends for Canadians. They will support a return to balanced budgets at an appropriate pace as the economy continues to recover from the global crisis. Three years after the stimulus phase of Canada's economic action plan was launched in response to that crisis, our economic recovery is advancing and of course it is clear that our policies are working.

•(1100)

I want to let the House know that scientific discoveries and new technologies are very important to a stronger economy. We are very proud of our scientists, which is why we have invested historically in science and technology and why it has been a pivotal point of all of our budgets, including this one.

Once again I would ask the opposition to support our recent budget and for once show its support for scientists, students and researchers.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I can see that the Minister of State for Science and Technology is a very slick salesman on these matters. However, I am trusting the scores of scientists who are sending me letters and contacting me personally saying that the government is fundamentally changing how we support and approach science in this country. It is shifting from scientists asking the questions and deciding funding to politicians asking the questions and basing funding on whims.

I worry that we are turning the scientific approach and innovation in this country into some kind of sausage machine where we put the meat in one end and the sausage comes out the other. That is not how science works, and that is what scientists are telling me.

Earlier in the day, the minister of state stated that the MRS cuts were solely decided by NSERC, but I doubt this. However, does he think these cuts are a mistake?

Business of Supply

•(1105)

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Madam Speaker, we were asked by the Canadian people to find efficiencies in how the government operates. We did that process. We received a strong mandate to complete that promise.

We have increased our investments in science and technology. The member is talking about 37 agencies. I sympathize with that. Approximately \$100,000 per agency. To pare that to 1.1 billion new dollars for science and technology where we can find efficiencies and do a better job for Canadians but continue to invest more so that we can do the new challenges of the new economy and allow scientists to continue basic research as well as applied and getting it to the market is a brilliant idea. It not only helps Canadians, it can actually save the lives of people all around the world.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, while listening to the hon. minister of state give his speech, my impression was that he had totally missed the point of this motion.

We are not debating whether we value science. Many people on both sides of this House value science. We are not debating whether we should try to encourage businesses to invest more in research and development or whether we should encourage industry-academic partnerships.

What we are debating is whether, when government scientists give the government advice that it does not want to hear because it embarrasses the government, it should, nevertheless, pay attention to those scientists and give those scientists the resources they need to do their job.

Why is the government afraid of what its own scientists are telling it? This is not about industrial policy or making Canadian businesses competitive. It is about whether the government will listen to its own scientists and take their advice in formulating the best possible policies for the people of Canada?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Madam Speaker, the simple answer is that we do that all the time.

I just mentioned in my speech organizations like the Canadian Council of Academies and the Science Technology Innovation Council. These are organizations that publish the state of the nation address. For example, the Canadian Council of Academies and a number of organizations provide advice to the government. It is not always favourable to the government, which is why we listen and why we massage our policies. We re-invest in new areas because our scientists actually tell us that they have invented something over here and that they now need to work on this thing over here. That is how policy changes and how scientific research evolves.

The NDP thinking that because we are modernizing for the benefit of Canadians by moving our resources from one area that may no longer be necessary to an area of great need for the nation moving forward is a cut is completely wrong because the resources that were here are actually reinvested over here, and then some.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Madam Speaker, there are many Canadians who do not understand the difference between science and technology. There are profound differences. I have no doubt that our government and the minister

understand and support technology, but I wonder if they really understand and support science.

I have a broad question for the minister. Does he really believe in science and the implications of scientific inquiry? I have a more specific question that will put a fine point on it. There is a vast bunch of science out there that says that life was created on this planet three to four billion years ago, and there are other theories. Does the minister believe that life was created on this planet through evolution three to four billion years ago or does he subscribe to a different theory?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Madam Speaker, what I would recommend to the hon. member is that when he tightens that towel around his neck at nighttime that he not do it for more than 20 seconds. It actually ends up causing cerebral anoxia that leaves permanent brain damage.

What I can say is that we obviously support basic research all the way through to applied research. In fact, we are looking at particle accelerators that can create the next generation of medical isotopes. We are working on the CERN project, which is the Large Hadron Collider where we are trying to smash together protons. In Canada, we are investing in basic research for the pipeline of the future and applying it so that we can create jobs today.

The question is this: Will that member support this budget or reject it like he always has?

•(1110)

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the minister a question, but maybe I should put it into context for the members.

Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale is one of the five ridings that make up the greater city of Hamilton. Within that, through the KIP funding, we funded two programs at McMaster University. One was around nuclear research building renovations, another was health promotion and innovation, and also projects at Redeemer University College. All of these were to sustain and enhance the capability of researchers to perform research in their particular scientific areas.

Therefore, I would ask the minister, particularly because this would not only impact those institutions but also the local economy, why the NDP would vote against these things when they have the opportunity to vote for them.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Madam Speaker, there are a couple of purposes behind that type of investment. One is that, while we rebuilt those facilities, we created jobs right away, when the economy needed them most, for construction workers, architects, draftsmen, drywallers and so on. Obviously it allowed for a better quality laboratory facility for researchers to work in.

Business of Supply

Indeed, one of the research projects down in that area brought the world's expert in automotive energy storage from the United States. This is one of the largest automotive initiatives for innovative discovery literally in North America. That is a great news story for Canada and a great news story for the automotive industry. That is why we are attracting bright minds. That is why we know we will create those high quality jobs of the future.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, in his speech, the minister of state said that NSERC made the cut to the MRS program, but then, in his answer to my previous question, he said that the government found efficiencies and made the cut. I am just wondering what it is. Did NSERC make the cut to MRS or did the government make the cut to MRS, and will it restore the funding if it is the government's choice?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the opportunity to clarify that.

In fact, these were recommendations that the efficiencies be found in these various programs. That has happened all across the government. We took great pains to look at the various areas where we could find these savings, not just in science and technology but in all departments that had the least impact on the overall outcomes, including the effect on full-time people.

We have seen moderate reductions across the government meeting our commitment to the Canadian people in the last election in finding those efficiencies. Of course, those were recommended up the ladder to the departments and on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is the first time that I have spoken in this House as the lead critic for the Liberal Party.

I would like to thank all those who make it possible for me to do the job of representing the people of Kingston and the Islands for their support.

[*English*]

I also thank those who made it possible for me to study and work in the field of science, and that includes the Government of Canada and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. I thank the member for Burnaby—Douglas for his motion today that allows us to discuss the value of science and the effects on ill-considered cuts to scientific research programs of the Government of Canada.

Today, before I focus on the main idea of my speech, I will mention some things that concern me and what are ill-considered cuts to research. Two examples that come from NSERC, which have already been mentioned in debate today, are the proposed elimination of the research tools and instrumentation program which provides money to buy and repair medium-sized equipment and is crucial to building a research laboratory, and the major resources support program which is crucial to funding the operation of infrastructure that the Government of Canada has already invested in. It is crucial to allowing us to get a return on our investment.

Scientists are telling me that cutting the research tools and instrumentation program is like sending carpenters to work without hammers. They are using words like “major disaster” or “extremely ill-advised”. Some examples of things that researchers are saying

that they would not be able to buy without this program are trucks for biologists who go out and do field work, and simple things like microscopes, magnets and lasers. The program is very important because it is used to repair equipment. Equipment could break down at any time and the process for getting equipment grants from a program like CFI takes a long time. CFI is not structured to fix equipment that breaks down. So the researcher may have to choose between firing some graduate students or fixing a crucial piece of equipment.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

One scientist told me that such shortages could potentially ruin the careers of new researchers.

[*English*]

I am hearing from young researchers that they do not want to come or are regretting coming to Canada after hearing about these proposed cuts. One of the concerns I will convey to the minister during this debate is that the policies set forth in budget 2012 would result in these cuts. He may blame NSERC for these cuts but he is the minister and he needs to take responsibility and he should be listening to the strong language that is being used by scientists in reaction to these proposed cuts.

I will now turn to the MRS program. These proposed cuts will affect facilities, as I have said before, where we have invested in large scientific infrastructure and whose use will be curtailed because of these cuts. It is like owning a car but having no money for gas. This includes the Super Dual Auroral Radar Network in which we have international agreements to monitor the sky around the earth with radar. This affects any business that has to do with satellites. The proposed cuts to MRS will curtail the use of the Canadian Institute for Neutron Scattering. It will curtail the use of the Brockhouse Institute for Materials Research, which is found in Hamilton at McMaster University in the riding of my hon. colleague who asked a question previously. It will affect living collections of algae and cyanobacteria and fungi that have been carefully isolated, which could have all sorts of uses and applications in industry and cannot be replaced at a later date.

These are things that concern me. It is just a small sample of the massive number of comments and emails that I have received from scientists in Canada who are concerned about the cuts to research funding. That is just the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council.

Business of Supply

The motion today is not so much about the overall level of funding for science or support for industry or business competitiveness as it is about how the government chooses to value science in the service of good government.

As one of the few scientists in the House today, I am proud to support the motion on the value that scientists and the scientific approach have to offer to the Government of Canada as it serves the people of Canada.

I am also proud to speak for the party that I chose to join, the Liberal Party, because Liberals believe that for good governance, slogans and ideology are never a good substitute for facts, evidence, a scientific approach and just hard work.

Liberals are the most likely to say that such and such an issue seems complicated and before they decide what their position is on that issue, they will do some homework. This is the kind of party of which I want to be a part. These are the kinds of colleagues with whom I want to work. They can best serve the people of Canada.

By contrast, the Conservative government believes that if enough ministers and MPs fan out across the country and repeat the phrase "responsible resource development" enough people will believe it so they can pass Bill C-38, the omnibus budget bill, and get re-elected. That is not the best thing for Canadians. When the Liberals hear that, they simply smile and say that it is an empty slogan.

We must put scientists in place and give them the resources to evaluate the risks of government policies so government can make informed development decisions for natural resources. We must provide them with the equipment and the staff to monitor the natural environment so they can measure any damage to the environment or any danger to people.

Additionally, we must let these scientists speak freely to the public about their research. People need to have a dialogue with scientists to understand the knowledge that scientists have gained for their benefit, knowledge for which taxpayers have paid. Governments must not be allowed to control this flow of information, at least democratic governments. This is really the only way Canadians can be assured that true responsible development is occurring.

Instead of cutting 11% of the workforce, over 700 employees of Environment Canada, cutting scientists who monitor water pollution, industrial emissions or climate change, let us put money on the table now and make a multi-year commitment to fully fund the environmental monitoring of resource development projects such as the extraction of bitumen. Then let those scientists speak freely of their research for the benefit of the people of Canada.

● (1120)

[Translation]

Scientists must be able to speak freely for the benefit of the people of Canada.

[English]

Why are Conservatives against free speech for scientists? I am not making this up. The international scientific community and science journalists have spoken up and called upon the government to stop muzzling scientists.

In the United States, government scientists have been encouraged to talk about their research and even give their personal opinions about government policy, as long as they make it clear that it is just their personal opinion.

[Translation]

In December 2011, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued an administrative order on scientific integrity to encourage its scientists to speak freely to the public and the media about the results of their research.

Why is the Government of Canada opposed to free speech for scientists?

[English]

Liberals believe in free speech as do most Canadians. Why do the Conservatives get off the train? It is not a rhetorical question. The answer is that the Conservative government does not accept criticism. It is not politically convenient. It is just embarrassing. It is a roadblock to continued power.

Is it just a couple of journalists who are complaining, as the Minister of the Environment has said? If a couple of journalists do not matter to the public good, I would ask the House to recall how Richard Nixon felt about the pesky journalists from *The Washington Post* 40 years ago.

By contrast, Liberals believe that welcoming criticism will improve one's understanding, just as scientific ideas depend on criticism in order to improve and become stronger. Science is powerful because it welcomes criticism. Criticism from scientists will help governments and others make smarter decisions, thereby making Canada stronger.

Yes, the Conservatives will be embarrassed at some point. Every government makes mistakes, but a strong government for a strong country is one that recognizes and corrects mistakes.

To do this, governments must also be open about history. It is why the commission that investigated Canada's residential schools for aboriginals was called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. That is why the commission that was set up in South Africa to study the effects of apartheid was called the truth and reconciliation commission. One must reveal the truth before a nation can reconcile and move forward.

[Translation]

The truth must be revealed before a nation can reconcile.

[English]

The Conservative government is making drastic cuts to Library and Archives Canada that will seriously harm our ability to preserve and access Canada's past. That includes a 20% cut to the workforce.

Business of Supply

Related to what I just said about truth and reconciliation, the archival material in the LAC was instrumental in supporting the testimony from victims of the residential schools before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The minister will say that staffing cuts are justified because materials are being accessed online, but only 4% of the LAC's physical materials are available online and now 50% of the digitization and circulation staff is being cut. Conservatives have also eliminated the national archive development program, which provided funding to local communities, about 800 of them, to preserve local history in Canada.

Why spend money to save things in the National Archives and make them accessible? It is not the same thing and does not feel as good as celebrating a glorious event of the past that buttresses the ideology of the government of the day. It is about having information available, making it possible to study and understand the mistakes of the past so we can fix them and not repeat them in the future. A truly strong government would be open about its mistakes. A truly strong government would embrace its history and not simply retell it.

Liberals believe that science and a scientific approach are what the Government of Canada needs for an honest accounting of its successes and failures. I believe that providing an honest accounting in Ottawa is one of the greatest things we as MPs can do for our country.

One thing people have learned over the last few centuries is the value of observation and measurement. That is why we have made advances in science and technology. It is the idea of empiricism, of measuring and counting the number of teeth in a horse's mouth and counting the number of people, that gives us the ability to have smart government policies, to really understand what we are trying to govern.

There is an example that has already been brought up in the House today, and that is the Experimental Lakes Area. This is a great example of doing real experiments in real situations so we make smart decisions about environmental policy concerning clean water. The federal government has announced that it will cease funding for the internationally renowned Experimental Lakes Area, which is in northern Ontario and comprises about 58 lakes that have been set aside for pollution experiments.

Scientists pollute these lakes on purpose and then watch the whole ecosystem for decades to see what happens. Then they are obliged to return these experimental areas back to their original state. Research during the experiments and the renewal have helped us understand mercury pollution, the effect of phosphates and detergents, green algae blooms, acid rain and climate change. If people believe that pollution regulations are too strict, they need to know that these very experiments are the ones that help us understand how much pollution is tolerable.

Ending funding for the ELA goes against two of my core beliefs. People have to conduct experiments and measurements to really understand how the world works. This is what I believe in as a scientist. We must use facts and evidence to make good policy, and that is what I hope to bring to the House, along with my colleagues in the Liberal Party and other members in the House.

●(1125)

I next want to turn to Statistics Canada, which is having its budget cut by about \$34 million on an ongoing basis, about 7% of its budget. The head of Statistics Canada resigned a couple of years ago to protest the elimination of the mandatory long form census. This is another example of how the government wants to avoid data.

Data is important for telling us about the country and its people, where they live and how they live, so we construct smart policy. Even if all we want to do is cut taxes, we want to know what effect those cuts will have, who will receive those tax cuts and what will happen in the country. We need statistics and good data to understand the effect of tax cuts on the Canadian population, not to mention good social policy that is meant to help people who live on the margins and who need our help. That help really defines for what Canada stands.

The First Nations Statistical Institute was brought in by a previous Liberal government of Paul Martin back in 2005 and the board was only appointed in 2009. Now the government wants to cut the institute. There was a realization that not enough census data was being collected from our first nations. This was hindering the creation of good policy and smart policy. It was decided that we would have a special institute to collect data. Now the government wants to get rid of this institute.

If government wants to do more with less money, if it wants to be more efficient and make every taxpayer dollar go as far as possible to serve the people of Canada, it needs information. It needs information to make smarter decisions and it needs an attitude that respects collecting proper information, thinking carefully and working hard to use that information to make every dollar go as far as possible.

I want to conclude with a few things that I and my party believe.

●(1130)

[*Translation*]

The Liberals believe that science is more effective than slogans. The Liberals believe that science is effective because it welcomes criticism. The Liberals believe that Canada needs science's honest accounting in order to be able to make informed decisions and to be competitive in the world.

[*English*]

Madam Speaker, from your chair, every morning a daily prayer is read. Let me read an extract from that:

[*Translation*]

Grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to preserve the blessings of this country for the benefit of all and to make good laws and wise decisions.

Business of Supply

[English]

We have been blessed in our country with the people, the resources and the institutions to pursue systematic knowledge, to observe, measure and understand what we see in the world and what we see in our country and to do all of this in the service of the people of Canada.

[Translation]

We ask God:

Guide us in our deliberations as Members of Parliament, and strengthen us in our awareness of our duties and responsibilities as Members.

Let us appreciate the value of scientific knowledge, which can effectively guide our country toward the future.

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened very closely to my colleague's speech, and I hope he can help me work through a dilemma that I face.

I hear contradictory statements from Minister of State for Science and Technology. The first is that the government is putting more money than ever into science. It is tripping over itself to open up the coffers and help scientists investigate problems. In the next breath, the government says that it has found efficiencies and is making cuts. With one breath it is saying that it is keeping everything the way it is and in the next breath it is saying that it is fundamentally shifting so that science can serve industry.

I find this a problem. The government cannot keep things the way they are and fundamentally change them. Could my colleague perhaps shed some light on these rather contradictory statements made by the government?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Madam Speaker, it is not a problem that the government is encouraging industry-academic collaboration in trying to make our Canadian businesses as competitive as possible. That is good for Canada, but it is clear that the government is doing it at the expense of basic research, notwithstanding what the minister has said. We heard it from all the scientists who have written in to comment and strongly disagree with what the Minister of State for Science and Technology is saying.

It is clear from the budget, for example, of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, that the funding for basic research through discovery grants has been going down every year. It is a shift in priorities towards funding research to work on immediate problems of industry and decreasing funding for work on basic research, which is the kind of research that would produce discoveries that we need to have in a pipeline of discoveries, to help Canada prosper in the decades to come and not just in the next few years.

• (1135)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a very good relationship with my hon. friend, but one of the points he made is that he likes to look back on historical facts. I would ask the hon. member to comment on some historical facts.

The facts are that at every single opportunity the government has had, every single budget we have ever tabled in this House, we have increased the investments for science and technology.

The second fact is that at every single opportunity on those budgets, the NDP members have voted against those investments for science and technology.

The third and final fact is this. My hon. friend was not here, but in the last recession that Canada faced, nothing like this one, the Liberal government of the time gutted science and technology. It not only transferred health care costs to the provinces and gutted them federally, and gutted education costs, it also cut science and technology.

By the way the member is speaking, and I believe he is sincere, will he now cross the floor and become a true Conservative?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister of State for Science and Technology for his question. It allows me to have a little fun here and relax after a speech. Sometimes I am tempted to speak my own mind, but I will address the question the minister brought up about the cuts that were made two recessions ago.

The reason why all sorts of cuts were made was because the Liberal government of the day inherited a giant budget deficit from the previous Conservative government. On the other hand, the current Conservative government inherited a surplus and turned it into a deficit. Members can see that when a giant budget deficit is inherited from a Conservative government, and we know that the next government is going to inherit another giant budget deficit from the current Conservative government, we have to make some cuts.

The government that created the deficit should be responsible for those cuts. I will not be joining that party.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my colleague can comment on the importance of research on the environment.

Tens of thousands of Manitobans are very much aware that there are some serious issues regarding Lake Winnipeg and its future. They are concerned with what the government is doing. Could the member comment on the importance of research, of having scientists involved in making sure that government policy will benefit places like Lake Winnipeg?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Madam Speaker, any ecosystem is complicated. Sometimes we do not know the unintended consequences of a proposed remedy to a problem. Therefore, we need scientists who understand the ecosystem. We need a multidisciplinary approach with biologists, limnologists and people who really understand how a complicated ecosystem of a lake might respond if we try to apply some policy solution to deal with a problem.

That is why the Experimental Lakes Area is so important. We can isolate a lake and do a real experiment with all the complications in the real world to test a policy solution, to test a remedy, to make sure that we do not have unintended consequences in these very complicated ecosystems.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my Liberal colleague for his comprehensive speech, which provided many concrete examples of the long-term repercussions on scientific research.

I would like him to talk a bit more about the steps that Canada should take to truly be an active participant in the knowledge economy.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Ted Hsu: Madam Speaker, this gives me a chance to talk about something in the speech given by minister of state.

It is true that the government funded CANARIE, the ultra-high-speed Internet backbone that is used by researchers, hospitals and universities. However, it was only funded for two years instead of five years and it was only funded at a fraction of the previous level of funding.

We are talking about working in a knowledge economy. More and more, we are sending larger amounts of data across the country and around the world. That is why it is so important, if we want our researchers in the public sector to be competitive in the world, to give them that ultra-high-speed Internet backbone to participate in the knowledge economy.

I am surprised that the government did not renew its previous level of funding, which was for five years and was, I believe, 20% or 30% higher than the funding level that is in the current budget. This is a basic tool that our researchers in Canada need in order to be competitive. Having seen that, I do not know, really, what the government's strategy is and why it did that.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked about the archives and the changes that are happening there. He talked about a 20% cut.

We had that presentation recently and DRAP, the actual cuts in the budget, are about 4% of that 20%. The chief of that organization was making structural changes as to how it was operating, regardless.

Is it not important as a scientist, as he says he is, to tell the truth? He indicated there was a 20% cut when actually there was not. Or is it just his Liberal approach to put out whatever the number might be even though it might not be the truth?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Madam Speaker, my goodness, Conservatives are worried about whether numbers are right or not. That is something we do not hear too often.

My research showed a cut of 20%. If that is slightly wrong, I apologize. But that is what my research turned up. I would be forthcoming with changing numbers if the Conservative government were forthcoming with numbers as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Yesterday, hundreds of Canadians took part in the Black Out Speak Out campaign. Environmental groups and organizations such

as Équiterre, Greenpeace, Ecojustice and the David Suzuki Foundation, as well as scientists and ordinary Canadians participated. All these Canadian Internet users came together to condemn the Conservative government's approach to the environment and democracy. Therefore, today it is very timely that we are debating the opposition motion concerning cuts to science and technology.

I believe this is a real tragedy because it will be some years until we see the impact of these cuts on our daily lives. Once again, it seems that the Conservatives are trying to mortgage our future with this omnibus bill. Honestly, as a young Canadian, I find it revolting.

Basically, the opposition motion is taking the government to task for three things: muzzling scientists; showing contempt for basic research and the social sciences; and cutting the research programs of various departments, including Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Statistics Canada and the various Canadian research councils, as well as closing the National Council of Welfare and the First Nations Statistical Institute.

The Conservatives had shown their contempt for science and research long before this most recent budget. During their first year in power, they cut off funding to a dozen or so research programs. That was also around the time when Status of Women Canada's budget was reduced in a draconian way and its mandate changed in order to specifically exclude any work related to research. The Conservatives had no interest in acknowledging gender inequality because that went against their ideology.

Then, in 2010, the Conservatives got rid of the long form census, an essential decision-making tool used by various federal departments, the provinces and municipalities, businesses and non-governmental organizations.

We cannot underestimate the importance of science and technology when it comes to the governance of the country. Let us not forget that several members of the Conservative government question basic climatology. Countless statements from across the way deny the impact of human activity on climate change. Just this week, journalist Mike De Souza reported that a Conservative MP wondered whether volcanoes might be the real culprits behind climate change.

Business of Supply

I am not using this example to embarrass my hon. colleagues, but rather to underscore the importance of scientific experts in the governance of this country. After all, very few members in this House are experts in climate change. However, instead of learning more about the issue, my Conservative colleagues prefer to slash funding to the organizations and projects that used to play key roles in the governance of this country. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy is one example of this. In short, we have a government that does not trust science and is willing to do whatever it takes to advance its ideological agenda, even denying the facts.

This leads me to another problem with this government: the muzzling of scientists. For some time now, it appears as though the Conservative government has been trying to hide important information from the public by preventing government scientists from speaking to the media.

For the record, I would point out the case of Mr. Tarasick, who was denied the right to speak to the media regarding his research on climate change. The same thing happened to Kristi Miller who studied the causes of the sockeye salmon collapse in British Columbia.

The prestigious publication *Nature* even called on the Canadian government on two separate occasions to give its scientists their freedom of expression back.

This is the context in which the majority Conservative government has presented its first budget. The scientific community had every reason to be wary. For the past five years, this government has been choosing to ignore any scientific proof that goes against its ideology and trying to muzzle anyone who does not think the same way, even going as far as cutting funding to anyone who does not share its ideology.

Several times now in this House, I have had the opportunity to criticize the cuts to science and the environment made by the Conservatives in the most recent budget.

• (1145)

In particular, I have condemned the government's decision to dismantle the round table on the environment. I am shocked that the government is eliminating this valuable policy tool just because the organization insisted on talking about the cost of failing to address climate change.

I am also appalled by cuts to science programs and jobs at Environment Canada. For example, a key mining and paper industry emissions monitoring program will be cut, as will the unit responsible for sustainable water management and the oil spill intervention team. To me, that is simply irresponsible.

At Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the situation is even grimmer: 1,000 jobs will be cut because of restructuring.

According to the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is likely to cut all of its science teams working on the impact of contaminants on aquatic ecosystems. In Quebec, this means that the St. Lawrence estuary, one of the most contaminated in North America, is at risk.

At the Maurice Lamontagne Institute in Mont-Joli, 22 employees are in danger of losing their jobs. The Laboratory of Expertise in Aquatic Chemical Analysis will be closed. And another three biologist positions will be cut in Sept-Îles, Gaspé and Cap-aux-Meules.

Lyne Morissette, co-holder of the UNESCO Chair in Integrated Analysis of Marine Systems at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, did not hesitate to speak out about this attempt to silence science:

[This laboratory] is a jewel of marine science research in Canada. It provided scientific information that was crucial, but that probably did not suit the government, because these people worked extensively on the impact of hydrocarbons....It is no coincidence that these people were affected. Scientists are being muzzled, and the government does not want to hear what they have to say. It is clear that if [the Prime Minister] is not happy with something, he strategically cuts those who are getting in his way.

Also at the Maurice Lamontagne Institute, the only French-language science library on fisheries will be shut down. The government is taking this opportunity to transfer administrative positions to Fredericton, in the fisheries minister's riding.

In response to these changes, as well as the changes to the Fisheries Act regarding fish habitat protection, four former federal fisheries ministers, including two Conservatives, have spoken out publicly.

Tom Siddon, the Conservative fisheries minister from 1985 to 1990, said this:

[The Conservatives] are totally watering down and emasculating the Fisheries Act. They are really taking the guts out of the Fisheries Act and it's in devious little ways if you read all the fine print...they are making a Swiss cheese out of [it].

The cuts to Fisheries and Oceans Canada are tarnishing our international reputation. Indeed, a group of scientists from Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research denounced the closing of the Experimental Lakes Area, an open-air laboratory made up of 58 lakes, with the following statement:

The general public in Canada and across the globe has gained from the numerous insights resulting from the trail-blazing research at ELA over the past 45 years. It seems incredible that, at this time, the Canadian government should choose to destroy this unique, world-class research facility.

In addition to cutting the research being done as part of various departments' regular activities, the Conservative government has begun to fundamentally change the activities of the main centres that are conducting research across the country.

Not content with reducing the overall research funding envelope, the government is embarking on a reorientation of the research being done at the National Research Council Canada towards applications that are geared to the needs of private business.

The major losers in this ideological reorientation are the human sciences and the basic research activities that have been deemed less "useful" or less "profitable" by this government.

Let me conclude by expressing the hope that Canada may one day have a government that respects its scientists and that bases its decisions on reason and facts rather than on ideology and calculating partisanship.

Business of Supply

Our sick and our elderly deserve governments that know where to invest in health. Our provincial, municipal and aboriginal governments deserve a government with the data that allows for better support. Our anglers and hunters deserve a government with the information necessary to ensure the sustainable development of those resources. Our children and our generations to come deserve a government that is looking out for their economic, social and environmental future.

• (1150)

In short, Canadians deserve a government that takes into account the importance of science—something this Conservative government refuses to do.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, I believe the hon. member went to McGill University. In budget 2009, our federal government announced the knowledge infrastructure program, which did a number of things. It created jobs at the immediate time and it allowed for future research capacity at McGill. However, it also reduced tuition fee hike pressures, because the federal government is ultimately paying for university infrastructure.

The money went for brain imaging, upgrades and renovation of chemistry facilities, pulp and paper research and engineering innovation. With the province and federal government, it amounted to about \$103 million to improve the research capacity. It was for all kinds of things, from basic to all the way through.

The NDP voted against that funding. It voted against that money going into Quebec, in particular to the member's own university, if I am correct. I am wondering if she could comment and justify why the NDP would vote against that measure?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Madam Speaker, I would like to note that there have been enormous cuts to science. Despite the fact that the minister likes to cite specific projects and specific examples, when we look at the big picture, we see a brain drain happening in Canada. Young folks are leaving because they know that they cannot get funding for things like basic science.

Here on the NDP side we raise concerns with the government's tendency to take funding away from basic science and move it towards applied science. We know that we need both sides if we want to ensure a strong future. We know that the basic science from previous years, previous decades, has contributed to things that we have applied today. We know that advances in science in medicine have come from investments in basic science.

As I said in my speech, enormous cuts have been made to conservation programs, and I would like the minister to speak about those cuts.

• (1155)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a question that is related to the question that was just posed by the Minister of Science and Technology.

Because of the cuts to the research tools and instrumentation program and the major resources support program, one avenue that scientists have been looking at to pay for needed equipment or for

equipment repair is the indirect costs of research program. Therefore, they are going to be hitting up the universities to get money out of the indirect costs of research program. That is going to provide upward pressure on tuition fees. Would my hon. colleague care to comment about that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu: Madam Speaker, we certainly cannot accuse this Conservative government of wanting to lower tuition fees, but that is not the subject of this debate.

We see that Quebec universities are currently suffering as a result of the cuts made by this Conservative government. My office and those of my colleagues have received letters from the Université de Sherbrooke that say that essential projects have been cut. Universities across the country are carrying out unique projects that are not being conducted anywhere else. By eliminating these projects, we are losing irreplaceable data, essential data, that are used internationally.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member on her speech. She reminded us of the importance of having scientific data and evidence in order to advance and adjust our policies.

I would like her to quickly comment on the Conservatives' ideological attitude with regard to these cuts and how it undermines the integrity of the scientific community.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague has raised an important point.

Science affects not only the fields of medicine and fisheries and oceans, but also the governance of the country. It is therefore essential that a government use its scientists' expertise. It is essential that this government make decisions that are based not on ideology but on facts and science.

By cutting funding for the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, this government can make ideological decisions without any watchdogs and without any scientists to tell it that its approach is not science-based. Unfortunately, we see a government that has chosen to govern based on ideology.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to engage in the debate. I want to thank my colleague who spoke earlier and did such a good job of outlining the problems that Canadians are facing at the hands of the government as it goes about hacking and slashing away at science, facts and knowledge.

When we raise concerns about various programs that are being cut, the parliamentary secretary to the minister of state gets up and talks about the money that the government is giving to a program or a university or the like. What he is missing is the real crux of the problem here.

Business of Supply

It is not that those programs that the government is investing in are somehow wrong or bad; they are not. However, the danger is that it is cutting away research being done by government departments that is crucial in so many ways. I want to talk a bit about that in my few minutes that I have here today.

We are talking about environment science and fisheries science that enable us to understand two things. One is what development is doing to fish stocks and fish habitat—in other words, not just the fish but everything they eat, where they live and how they survive. That is what the government is attacking in the changes to the Fisheries Act. However, it is important science in that it allows us to know what impacts our activities are having on our environment, on other species, on plants and on the air we breathe.

I just participated in a discussion a few moments ago about the decision of the government, through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, to cut the Experimental Lakes project. This project has been in existence for four decades in northern Ontario and is made up of 58 small lakes. It does not just perform freshwater science in the laboratory; it has access to the ecosystem. It has access to living, breathing lakes on which it performs important research to determine the effects of various things we as humans do and the effects of development on that ecosystem. The government has decided to cut that.

I do not understand it. Scientists from around the world have condemned this decision, because they recognize the kind of contribution this one organization makes to research and science in the world with respect to how the animals within that ecosystem exist.

The other day there was a little story told by a former director of the Experimental Lakes Area, or the Freshwater Institute, as it is sometimes known, at our subcommittee. He talked about a study they were doing on acid rain and the acid rain levels that were being proposed to be set by government. They found that the levels did not affect the actual fish that were under review, so if they limited their study to that aspect, they would find that those levels of concentration were fine.

● (1200)

However, they went beyond that. They looked at the organisms, the other fish that those fish ate. They determined that the concentration level of acid rain that was being permitted did not affect that particular breed of fish, but it affected everything else that fish ate. In other words, if they had approved that concentration level of acid rain as permissible, it would not have directly killed that fish, but the fish would have starved to death, because all of the food that sustains that fish, allows it to thrive and reproduce, would have gone.

He made that point to underline the changes in the Fisheries Act which focus no longer on fish habitat, in other words the whole ecosystem, but focus most specifically on commercially viable fish. He pointed out that it is completely wrong-headed. He also made the point that the research that is being done by this institute, by the Experimental Lakes Area project, is so valuable. It has made so many important contributions, not only to this country, but to countries around the world in terms of its research.

It is just one example of the projects that have come under attack from the government. Just in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans alone there have been \$80 million of cuts to the departmental budget. Much of it has been staff cuts to science and research, which undermine our ability to manage threats to the fisheries.

There is a whole host of things in here: libraries, archives, the elimination of DFO's ocean pollution monitoring program, which will cut 75 staff, including Canada's only marine mammal toxicologist. The Centre for Offshore Oil, Gas and Energy Research will not close, but its work will be seriously curtailed as a result of cuts. That makes me crazy.

I am from Nova Scotia, and there is under consideration the development of the old Harry site in the Gulf to drill for oil. There is talk that the government will ram through whatever it needs to ram through this House in order to ensure that bitumen gets shipped out to the west coast. There will be a whole plethora of tankers running up and down that dangerous coastline, running the risk of serious oil spills, on the east coast, on the west coast. We have not even started talking about the Arctic.

At the same time that it is moving forward with that kind of development, without the necessary checks and balances, it is cutting the science that is available to make sure we know what we are doing and how to go about it.

My time is up, but I want to share this with the House. Yesterday the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was in Dartmouth, the community I represent. It appears from the media that he was not particularly well received. One of the questions he was asked was about the decision to cut funding for the Centre for Offshore Oil, Gas and Energy Research.

People asked him why he would do that, and he said that it would not close and that work would be done by the private sector. I thought to myself, who, Exxon Mobil? Maybe the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers would now be the scientific watchdog with respect to offshore oil development and drilling and the effect it will have on our coastline. These are the kinds of things—

● (1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I try to keep the members apprised of the time that is available to them, but unfortunately we have run out of time. Now we will go to questions and comments.

The hon. Minister of State for Science and Technology.

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), (CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale has been very helpful. He is very concerned about this file.

Business of Supply

We have a scientist we have been funding in the area of nanotechnologies who has now come up with a microscopic switch. One of the uses of this switch is to warn drivers on our highways of deer. It is a motion detector that can switch on a flashing yellow light.

My hypothetical question is this. Now that the research is done, we should move that technology to the commercial side and get it out there to save people's lives. If we then we shift to a new project of more need to the nation—not take it back, but shift it—would that member interpret that kind of progress as a cut to science?

• (1210)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, that is a beautiful example because that is important research. However, nanotechnology is also what the Experimental Lakes Area project is involved in. In fact, scientists around the world have referred to it as the world's only ecological supercollider. In other words, it is all about the use of ecological nanotechnology. I say for the minister of state to support that program, but also to support this program because it is doing equally, if not more, important work and that is the kind of threat the government would put the environment under.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that just as we were talking about nanotechnology I was reading an email from a very prominent nanotechnology researcher who is worried about whether he should be leaving the country to do his research.

My question is about the Experimental Lakes Area. It is a bit strange that in the last couple of years, in the fiscal years ending 2010 and 2011, there was about \$800,000 spent by the Conservative government when it was still a minority government on a state-of-the-art research facility in the Experimental Lakes Area. That is when it was a minority government, maybe being careful and afraid to do what it really wanted to do. Now we have a majority government and the Conservatives decide they want to kill the Experimental Lakes program.

Would my colleague comment on the change in behaviour of the Conservatives, spending money to build a state-of-the-art research facility when they were a minority government, and then when they are a majority government and can really do what they want to do, killing the funding for the Experimental Lakes Area?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I had this to say earlier. When somebody said to me, “Do the members opposite just not care about information, facts and knowledge?” I said, “Not for a second”.

The women and men on the opposite side are not stupid. They are intelligent people, but the problem is this. What they have shown is if they do not agree with the science and it does not serve their purposes, then they are going to shut it down. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy is gone. The National Council of Welfare is gone. The Experimental Lakes Area project is gone.

I do not understand why the government does not have the confidence that is necessary, and that Canadians demand from their government, to allow the House of Commons to be filled with differing opinions and ideas so we ensure that the decisions we make in the final analysis are based on sound research, sound facts and sound debate.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission.

In 2007 our government released our science and technology strategy. It lays out a framework to guide strategic investments with the goal of fostering Canadian advantage in three areas: entrepreneurial advantage, knowledge advantage and people advantage. This strategy is guided by four core principles: promoting world-class excellence, focusing on priorities, encouraging partnerships and enhancing accountability.

In 2009 we announced Canada's economic action plan in response to the global economic crisis. As part of this plan, and consistent with the S and T strategy objectives, the government created the knowledge infrastructure program. More commonly known as KIP, the \$2 billion program was designed to provide significant, short-term economic stimulus in communities across Canada while enhancing the long-term training and research capacity of Canadian universities and colleges.

Including funds leveraged from the provincial and territorial governments, educational institutions and private sector partners, this program resulted in a total investment of more than \$5 billion in 190 communities across the country. The work at these facilities created and maintained jobs for engineers, construction workers and many others when they were needed most. The impact that these investments had on research and training in Canada was truly remarkable and provided clear evidence of this government's commitment to research in Canada.

These projects contributed to the development of Canada's knowledge advantage by enhancing research facilities. KIP has improved the ability of institutions to conduct research in life sciences, information and communications technologies, energy and environment, and other disciplines, as well as in key sectors such as automotive and aerospace.

An example of our support for scientific research is our project at the University of Manitoba for its regenerative medicine renovation and development project. Thanks to funding from KIP and the province, a major renovation and expansion of the school's medical sciences building was completed. The expansion accommodated new labs, offices and study space to support new faculty, graduate students, lab technicians and post-doctoral fellows. The project enhanced the university's ability to educate future doctors and develop one of the top three regenerative medicine programs in Canada.

KIP helped develop Canada's people advantage by expanding training capacity at colleges and universities. In total, KIP projects added 2.2 million square feet to classrooms and training facilities, as well as 2.6 million square feet of laboratory space.

Business of Supply

It may interest the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas to note that support under this category included a \$39 million KIP project at the British Columbia Institute of Technology in his riding. Critical renovations to infrastructure at BCIT included state-of-the-art teaching technologies and sustainable building systems, including a micro-electricity grid. Furthermore, the project included completing seismic upgrades and modernizing safety and ventilation systems. The project was also designed to meet the requirements of LEED, leadership in energy and environmental design gold certification.

Also in the member's riding, the government funded a major overhaul of Simon Fraser University's chemistry facility. With \$24.4 million in KIP funding, SFU completed a \$49.4 million overhaul of the facility that brought the labs up to modern standards. Built to the LEED gold standard, the extensive improvements included a new exterior envelope and roof, seismic bracing, new fume hoods, lab benches, new heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, and upgraded mechanical, electrical and safety systems.

A total of 380 projects increased the energy efficiency of campuses, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 175,000 tonnes of CO₂, which is the equivalent of the emissions of 34,000 passenger cars. These projects also provided estimated operational savings of \$23 million per year.

One particularly interesting example is the construction of a 120,000 square foot environmental demonstration and training facility at the Nova Scotia Community College. The hon. member who just spoke might be interested in that. It incorporated solar panels, planted rooftops, living walls covered with vegetation, wind turbines, photovoltaic panels and geothermal heating and cooling.

Roughly half of all KIP projects resulted in significant health and safety improvements, addressing areas such as accessibility for persons with disabilities, fire safety, security systems, air quality, water leakage and resistance to earthquakes.

●(1215)

Finally, the program helped develop Canada's entrepreneurial advantage through new and expanded business incubation facilities that supported effective collaboration between academia and the private sector. These facilities are crucial in helping to accelerate the commercialization of the academic research into products in the marketplace, to expose more professors and students to real world applications and to encourage more private sector innovation and growth.

One of the best examples of this type of project is the MiQro Innovation Research Centre at Université de Sherbrooke. The Government of Canada partnered with the province of Quebec on this \$218 million project to build a centre of excellence for electronic research and assembly. The new MiQro Innovation Research Centre is expected to become a world leader in assembling the next generation of microchips, thanks to collaboration with key local industry partners, including IBM Canada and Teledyne DALSA, Inc.

In just 31 months, KIP went from concept to conclusion and provided key stimulus to our economy at a critical time. In addition to supporting scientific research infrastructure, the program also

clearly demonstrated the government's commitment to sound management of public finances.

The Auditor General's report examined the effectiveness of the implementation of all economic action plan programs, including KIP, and noted, "the total time needed to design, review, and approve programs was reduced from the approximately six months normally required to two months". The AG's report held up KIP as "an example of speedy implementation".

The report recognized the effectiveness of KIP's project monitoring and reporting systems, its speedy implementation and its effective collaborations with provinces and territories, as well as colleges and universities. Thanks to those partnerships, KIP stands out as a tremendous example of governments working together to take action during a time of great economic uncertainty.

We are quite pleased that the Auditor General of Canada confirmed that the program was delivered effectively and efficiently. KIP not only made a difference in meeting immediate economic challenges, but it also set the foundation for future prosperity in the knowledge economy. The program was an excellent demonstration of our strong commitment to supporting Canada's science and technology sector. The investments made provided a strong base for research and helped create new facilities that would help attract new students and provide a better educational experience for tomorrow's highly skilled workers.

●(1220)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat a reaction that I had to the speech by the of the minister of state and I had the same reaction to the speech of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

I believe the parliamentary secretary has missed the point of this motion. The point is not that we should not be funding the knowledge infrastructure program, the point is whether the government will listen to advice from scientists and people who have made measurements, observed the country, done their homework and figured out and analyzed the situation.

Will the government take advice that it does not agree with or that embarrasses it? Will it have a scientific approach to good governance as opposed to simply funding technology or ensuring that we have good buildings and facilities in our country?

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member suggests that maybe I missed the point of the opposition motion today. I would suggest that there really is no point to the opposition motion today.

In terms of the member's comment about taking the advice of the experts, the Minister of State for Science and Technology takes the advice of those experts every day. The minister meets with stakeholders across the country on a regular basis in round tables and meetings where he hears their views.

Business of Supply

We only have to look as far as economic action plan 2012 to see how the government has taken that advice. We can see things like the reinvesting of \$37 million annually, starting in 2012-13, to the granting councils to enhance their support for industry and academic research partnerships. I have more lists I could go through if I get another such question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is really obvious how narrow-minded the government opposite is when we hear responses like that, and especially when the minister insults members opposite by belittling what they are saying. For nearly a year, the government has been trying to muzzle any opposition.

We are talking about science and technology. These fields advance civilizations, from Galileo to Newton and from Darwin to Einstein. These people had to face similar opposition.

Now, the government is putting Canadian scientists on the chopping block. Once again, the government's narrow-mindedness is muzzling these voices.

I have to wonder how the government, which claims to be responsible and open-minded, can oppose a motion like the one that was moved today.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about research and listening to Canadians. Before he voted against the budget in 2012, I wonder if he actually took the time to take a look at the budget document. If he had taken that time, he would have seen some interesting investments that were made in the interests of all Canadians, investments like \$60 million for Genome Canada to launch a new applied research competition in the area of human health and to sustain the science and technology centres until 2014-15. It is on page 54 if he wants to read it. There are \$6.5 million over three years for a research project at McMaster University to evaluate team-based approaches to health care delivery, \$17 million over two years to further advance the development of alternatives to existing isotope production technology and \$10 million over two years to the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research to link Canadians to global research networks.

I could continue to read through the budget document for the hon. member, but I would suggest that he take the time to read the document himself.

• (1225)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the House on the important issue of government science supporting our decision making and, in fact, our government's record of upholding this important function.

It is important for fisheries and oceans because it has a broad and powerful mandate, requiring the minister to regularly make decisions affecting Canadians. Many Canadians whose lives and businesses are directly influenced by this mandate include commercial, recreational and aboriginal fishermen, those in the marine transportation business, developers in proximity of water, aquaculturists,

tourism operators and many more. Not least are the many everyday Canadians who rightfully want our aquatic resources to be protected and available for both current and future generations.

Therefore, science at fisheries and oceans is a critical element in ensuring that sound decision making is achieved. Today, in the few minutes I have, I want to focus on this science program, outlining its multifaceted nature and some notable recent achievements and investments in new and continuing science activities since 2006.

The numerous fisheries and aquaculture operations in our country generate a total of \$5.3 billion in GDP, and that is 2008 values, and in so doing, support upwards of 71,000 Canadians, including their families and communities. In order to advise the minister on the potential outcomes of the many resource-use decisions that are needed, the fisheries science program at DFO maintains a broad suite of aquatic resource monitoring activities, including research vessel surveys and regular population assessments.

This vital fisheries science program has seen several important investments in recent years, including \$8.4 million per year in permanent funding for ecosystem-based science and a total of \$68.5 million since 2007 to maintain key collaborative activities with the fishing industry.

Let me begin with aquaculture, where fisheries and oceans aquaculture science is essential and has two main programs. For more than 10 years, the aquaculture collaborative research and development program has partnered with industry to invest \$2 million per year in scientific research to improve environmental performance and fish health in aquaculture operations.

The second key aquaculture science program is the program for aquaculture regulatory research. This \$7 million program was founded in 2008. It supports the environmental management of the Canadian aquaculture sector.

Both are very important.

I will move on to aquatic invasive species, one of the leading threats to aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem health. DFO's national program on aquatic invasive species was initiated in 2005 and renewed in 2010, at \$4 million per year, to assist Fisheries and Oceans Canada to respond to the invasive species challenge. The research completed has yielded much valuable scientific advice.

In addition, on May 28, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced a significant investment to protect the Great Lakes from the threat of Asian carp. This new funding, totalling \$17.5 million over five years, is in addition to the \$8.1 million per year that we invest in the sea lamprey control program which, in collaboration with our partners, keeps the invasive sea lamprey numbers down by more than 90%.

Business of Supply

As shown, DFO is committed to the sustainability of the Canadian fisheries and aquaculture industries. However, it also aims to protect aquatic biodiversity upon which these fisheries depend. One key tool used by the department to achieve such protection is the Species at Risk Act of 2003. Species surveys conducted by DFO scientists are the main source of information to identify and protect aquatic species at risk. Budget 2012 made an investment of \$75 million over three years to support SARA implementation, including scientific activities.

This government is also serious about supporting responsible energy development. To that end, budget 2012 provided \$35.7 million over two years to introduce measures to support that key objective. Details are still being finalized, but the bulk of this funding will go to DFO to support the research activities needed to improve scientific knowledge and understanding of marine pollution risks and to manage the impacts in the event of a marine incident.

• (1230)

We are at the leading edge of science and several highly technical and emerging fields of science like genomics, which is the science that studies DNA in living organisms and how it affects their biological functions. The government has recently invested an additional \$1 million in fishery science through the genomics research and development initiative. This DNA analysis is making it possible to better distinguish among fish species, enhance our understanding of their population structures and improve the regulation of fisheries.

For example, as members know, the Fraser River sockeye salmon species on the west coast has been under some stress recently. Although 2010 was a record year, it has been in decline.

The species is made up of a number of different populations. Some come down the west coast of British Columbia and take a left turn at the Fraser River, and some take a right turn at Cultus Lake, and of course we call those the Cultus Lake sockeye. They look like every other sockeye, but to know which are which, we need to do some DNA analysis to know when the exploitation rate has been reached so that we can protect the population. It is an important area of science.

Marine transportation is fundamental to the nation's economic prosperity as well. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, known as UNCLOS, article 76, Canada is invited to provide evidence for territorial delineation of our continental shelf. This could potentially add a significant economic opportunity for Canadians, if rights on the sea bottom and sub-bottom resources on the Atlantic coast and in the Arctic outside our 200-mile exclusive economic zone are accorded to Canada.

Since 2004, over \$30 million has been provided to support the continental shelf work. This investment has not only yielded critical data for the Canadian submission to the UN but it has also enhanced our science capacity in hydrography, geology, ocean engineering and modelling of the sea bottom.

Other ocean sciences, such as oceanography, are a key element of the department's science agenda. Canada recognizes the need for ocean sciences; it is the foundation of our understanding of Canada's oceans.

To equip our scientists with the necessary tools to undertake this research, we have made an important strategic investment to construct a new ocean science vessel. This world-class vessel, to be finished in 2015, would ensure that departmental scientists have access to a state-of-the-art vessel and science equipment for their job.

Climate change is also very important. Canadians want to know that government operations and mandates are adapted so that effects of a changing climate will not unduly impact Canadians in the future. For this purpose, the department is benefiting from an investment of \$16.5 million over five years for science funding to assist the department adapt to climate change. These funds enable the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to identify the key risks of climate change and take action in response.

Our scientists are also well engaged with other scientists on the domestic front as well as the international area. Many DFO scientists have close links with universities, doing research in partnership and supervising graduate students. In recent years, we expanded this collaboration by teaming with NSERC and several Canadian universities to fund specific research networks that focus on research themes relevant to oceans and fisheries research.

In 2008, the NSERC Canadian Healthy Oceans Network, based at Memorial University, was created to develop scientific guidelines for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity resources in partnership with policy makers. DFO contributes more than \$1 million in ship time to this network. We have also contributed financially into a number of other similar networks that focus research on the impact of hydroelectric facilities, invasive species and fisheries research issues important to the fisheries industry.

To wrap up, we are proud of the excellent work done by our scientists and will continue to build on existing knowledge about our oceans, waterways and fisheries resources. Our government understands that science is essential to the long-term sustainability of Canada's fisheries. However, the government must continually review its operations to make sure that taxpayer dollars are focused and spent in a way to achieve the best results for Canadians and our marine environment and to address the needs of a changing world.

Over and above the approximately \$150 million the department spends on science programming each year in core funding, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, our government has invested an additional \$100 million to support key research for Canadians, the details of which I have summarized in my remarks here today. These are the types of projects on which we believe the Department of Fisheries and Oceans should continue to focus.

• (1235)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, rattling off a list of projects that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans spends money on misses the point of the motion.

Business of Supply

Let me address one of the points of the motion by asking the minister about muzzling scientists and not letting them talk to people.

If we go back to the announcement that Conservative Minister John Crosbie made in 1992 announcing the moratorium on the cod fishery and we try to understand how it is that we fished out all the cod without realizing it, we realize that fishery scientists thought there was a bunch of fish out there but the inshore fisherman, who actually went out and tried to catch fish, were saying that the number of fish was decreasing, as was their size.

The government scientists and the inshore fishermen were not talking. What they really should have done was sat down and said, "Boy, we disagree on the state of the cod population. We'd better sit down and resolve this". If they had done that, we may not have fished out the Atlantic cod.

What I want to ask my hon. colleague is this. Does he not agree with me that, if the government scientists had been talking with the people in Canada and exchanging ideas and information, we would have been in a better state in this country?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises an interesting point. In fact, he knows that there are a number of reasons why the Atlantic cod experienced a serious decline, including overfishing, but that was only one of them. There were some environmental issues as well.

In fact, I was in a study on the Atlantic coast trying to determine why the cod had not rebounded. That was in 2005. In effect, some people did tell us that they had told DFO that the stocks were declining and that we should stop fishing. I remember distinctly asking one of them, "Did you stop fishing?" He said, "Of course we didn't stop fishing." Therefore, there was a fair bit of blame to go around.

On the other point the member raised, the scientists at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans are talking to people regularly. They do more than 300 interviews a year with the media and certainly interact and relate, as I said in my comments, with other scientists, and they will continue to do that.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's participating in this debate. I wanted to go back to him with a question on the Experimental Lakes Area project and the decision of this government to cut funding for that organization. I mentioned earlier that this is a unique research facility that has been in existence for almost 50 years and has been instrumental in identifying environmental problems caused by acid rain, phosphorus in detergent and mercury from coal-fired power plants. It is one of the only facilities in the world where scientists can look at the impact of contaminants on the whole ecosystem.

I ask the parliamentary secretary if he would explain why the cut to this organization is in any way in the interests of the fishery.

• (1240)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, from a broader point of view, let me say that the nature of science is such that science programs, science research projects and so on need to keep evolving because we are faced with new challenges and new questions that need to be answered. They will not all be answered by government scientists by

any means, but they keep changing. That means we will be adding programs and at times we will be discontinuing programs that may not be as important as they once were. I think that is the case with the Experimental Lakes. It has done some good work and we hope it continues under the management of either a non-governmental organization or perhaps a university.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. We have run out of time again for questions and comments.

I just have a reminder for hon. members. I do see on a number of occasions that members are getting up to put questions to the member who has just spoken. We appreciate the co-operation of hon. members, when they do get recognized for a question, to keep that to around a minute or so. That way we can maybe get three questions in each round of five minutes.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the House to speak about an issue that is very important to Canadians. I will read the motion, but a lot of my comments will be focused on some of the issues I have dealt with in the past, one being the long form census, which we no longer have in this country, and my concerns about the process of eliminating that census and what the consequences are for this country.

The motion by my colleague states:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian scientific and social science expertise is of great value and, therefore, the House calls on the Government to end its muzzling of scientists; to reverse the cuts to research programs at Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Library and Archives Canada, National Research Council Canada, Statistics Canada, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada; and to cancel the closures of the National Council of Welfare and the First Nations Statistical Institute.

It is really important to note that over \$1 billion of cuts have taken place to a number of different departments, which are going to affect the competitiveness of Canada. When we look at the opportunity for research in the modern economy, it is the value-added economy that we need to be enhancing. This is why science and research are so important.

Canada has a tradition of falling from actually producing the end results of science and research. We do not often bring enough products to market. There has been a real conscious effort to work with universities and other entrepreneurs to try to bring some patents and other types of inventions into the manufacturing world, because we have seen hundreds of thousands of jobs lost in the manufacturing sector over the last number of years. My constituency has been particularly affected, as well as Ontario, Quebec and other places across Canada where the value-added economy has been lost. That is what is important about research and science. It is the backbone of the value-added society we really need to have for our exports.

Business of Supply

One of the statistics that is important to recognize is that in 2005 the Government of Canada at the time had a \$16 billion manufacturing export deficit. It is the value-added work done through manufacturing that is being lost because we were importing \$16 billion more than we were exporting out to the world. That grew in 2010 to \$80 billion. That is a significant shift. It is important to recognize that there is a significant place for a natural resource sector in our country, but it should not be only about lifting things out of the ground or chopping things down and then sending them away to be refined or processed elsewhere. We are more than just being able to take a piece of lumber or a tree and sending it off to China and then buying the table back later on. That is no way to organize our labour force, to sustain our cost of living or to encourage innovation. Often those decisions are made elsewhere in terms of the research and how it takes place.

One thing I will touch on briefly is the Investment Canada Act. As we have been seeing, the hollowing out of our manufacturing sector has occurred partly because there have been many takeovers of Canadian companies that have been uncontested by the government. In fact, recently it raised the threshold to \$1 billion. We are losing decision-making capabilities. For example, there is a situation in Hamilton where U.S. Steel has a very capable plant, workforce and environment. Despite all the government's rhetoric of lowering taxes to create jobs, U.S. Steel is not using this facility to its fullest capacity. It is barely using this facility.

I neglected to inform you, Mr. Speaker, that I am splitting my time with the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Getting back to the Investment Canada Act and the U.S. Steel facility, it has not been fired up again in terms of providing the proper resources in jobs and elements that could take place. In fact U.S. Steel has redirected some work back to the United States. Part of that is because of the Investment Canada Act that was changed, and it is being changed in the budget again.

• (1245)

An interesting sidebar is that by amending these acts and the types of things we are debating here today without using the parliamentary process often does not fix legislation. The Investment Canada Act, which is again being altered in this budget, has not gone to committee in the past, like it should have. We did study it indirectly, but did not study the actual legislative changes. These are some of the unintended consequences that would actually be addressed, even if the government had the right intent or the right agenda, because we could even get government amendments to legislation that have not properly thought through or there is a twist in something that did not work out through the process and that needs to be addressed.

It is important to note that one thing that will change is the statistics with regard to the census. What took place was that the minister at the time talked about personal privacy and that was one of the reasons the government would amend the long form census into a short form census. That is an issue that I am particularly concerned about because back in the day, a number of years ago under another administration, the government decided to outsource the census. Lockheed Martin actually got the contract. People might know Lockheed Martin for its manufacturing of arms across the

globe, but it also does censuses. It did the British census and a number of others. It picked up the Canadian census.

I was very concerned about that outsourcing and fought a long campaign to keep the data here in Canada. Lockheed Martin was going to assemble the Canadian data in the United States. What does that mean? It means that when our data leaves our soil and goes to the United States it is then subject to its privacy act. The privacy act is very particular. If the Government of the United States wants to access information from any source, it will get that information. What is important to note is that the company cannot disclose that the information has been accessed because of national security reasons. Therefore, if Lockheed Martin, for example, were storing the Canadian data in the United States and it was accessed by the U.S. government, it could not even disclose to us that this had taken place. We fought a long campaign to protect Canadians' privacy and ensure that the assembly of information at least took place here in Canada.

When the minister came forward and started talking about the privacy issues over the census, it was very disturbing because we did not have that type of a push back from Canadians. What we have done now is moved to a short form census. What that does is it takes away all the previous materials and censuses done in the past, which leaves us with no comparables. What ends up happening is that the data information we have today from this short form census cannot be compared with the previous years. There are no measurables in there. People often do not know that we have a lot of surveys in Canada and a lot of those surveys are backstopped by the science behind the census. Therefore, by losing this data and then having further cuts, we are actually undermining a lot of the programs.

Back in the year 2000, I was part of the complete count in Windsor, Ontario, where we actually went door to door to get the information. It is important because the information about age, sex, ethnicity with regard to living standards and all kinds of different things are used for important economic decisions.

I know I only have about a minute left, but it is important for people to realize that the long form census was an investment so that when decisions are made about how the public and how governments decide about transit, housing, the aging population and a number of different services, they have an educated backbone of science behind it. It is sad that we have lost this element because the privacy issue was never there. Ironically, the minister often talked about jailing people with regard to the census. We had a couple of Canadian citizens recently harassed about it, but nothing took place. At the same time, the minister has yet to correct this legislation problem on which we agreed from all sides of the House to do so.

Business of Supply

I will finish by thanking my colleague for bringing this very important issue forward. Science is the basis of our economy for the future. We need to be able to compete, but we cannot do so with these cuts and we cannot do so if we break down the science and eliminate the data we use to make important decisions.

•(1250)

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke on different topics, but several times he talked about the long form census as if it has disappeared.

Is the hon. member aware that there is still a long form census going out and that it is now voluntary? There are no jail sentences associated with not completing the long form census. Does he know what the response rate is on the long form census? There were more census forms sent out and we are still receiving that data.

Mr. Brian Masse: Actually, Mr. Speaker, that census is costing Canadians more money, around \$30 million more, to do a voluntary census.

All the statisticians, a number of businesses, organizations and groups, including the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada wrote supporting our census back in 2010 as an example.

All has basically been a waste. The voluntary census does not get into the specific details that the mandatory long form census had, ensuring that the demographics are represented by the return rate. We could have certain return rates that are higher or lower in different regions and that contaminates and skews the data.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pinpoint that science is actually knowledge. Science means knowledge and science is the basis for everything we do.

I heard the minister make a speech this morning and talk about the fact that we are a very small population compared to other countries in the world. The point is that because we are so small we cannot be competitive unless we are the best and the brightest, unless we carve out for ourselves, using basic science, niche markets that will allow us to be competitive and thrive in a global economy.

When we talk about cutting scientists and research, as the government, no matter what it says, has done, we are destroying our ability to be competitive in the world market. We have destroyed our ability, for instance, to look at something that Canada was well-known for around the world, which is biomedical research, the information that allowed us to make vaccines—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I do not wish to interrupt the hon. member, but the time is limited and we are trying to keep those questions and responses to about one minute.

The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to combine some of the Investment Canada Act and the statistical changes that took place. The real cue here is the fact that our value-added economy is being left behind.

When we have a small population, a wide geography and climate differential, the science is even more important for us to be effective in this world.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Not only is the government muzzling scientists, but it is also mortgaging our future and the future of research. Could my colleague elaborate a bit more on the brain drain and its impact?

•(1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, we have seen that with RADARSAT and a few other projects. It is very important. If we do not have a directive, we lose people from our field.

For example, right now we do not have an automotive strategy of any sort while the United States is very aggressive on that. So I have concerns. A number of plants across Ontario will be retooling and decisions need to be made soon. The United States and state governments have had an actual auto policy. Now Europe is creating an auto policy. We are not providing the opportunities for the scientists and the researchers.

My concern is that we have been very much on the forefront on automotive research, development and the movement into a greener sector and I am very worried that industries like that will be left behind.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Assaf Sukenik, a senior scientist at Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research, said:

By shutting down the ELA facility, the Government of Canada is stamping out the ability of the world scientific community to conduct the research required to formulate sound environmental policies.

Could the well-spoken member for Windsor West comment, please?

Mr. Brian Masse: It is critical, Mr. Speaker. In the last budget, only \$8 million were provided for the Great Lakes. Per capita, the fake lake in Muskoka actually received more money than the Great Lakes per capita.

With the U.S. pumping a lot of money into science and research, we are losing out on the opportunity to be a part of that.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 15 years ago, in 1997, three respected Canadian university scientists wrote a paper with a fascinating title, "Is scientific inquiry incompatible with government information control?". In other words, if that were not put simply enough, can science coexist with government manipulation? That is a very good question.

A line from that 1997 controversial report reads:

Scientists were also explicitly ordered then, as they are today, not to discuss "politically sensitive" matters...with the public, irrespective of the scientific basis, and publication status, of the scientist's concerns.

Business of Supply

Does that sound like scientists have been muzzled? It does to me.

I will read from the summary of that 1997 report because that 1997 report is as relevant today as it was then. It reads:

There is a clear and immediate need for Canadians to examine very seriously the role of bureaucrats and politicians in the management of Canada's natural resources. The present framework of government departments such as the DFO is based on the belief that the conservation of natural resources is best ensured by science integrated within a political body. Recent history would suggest otherwise.

The recent history that would suggest otherwise was the fall of the fisheries. Scientists were just a bit off when they missed the collapse of what was once the world's biggest fish resource on planet earth, northern cod off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

The trouble with science in Canada, fish science for example, is that it is tainted by politics. Science is manipulated and massaged by politicians and bureaucrats to meet their own objectives. That is the way it works.

The short answer is, no, scientific inquiry is not compatible with government information control, the key word being "control". I have seen too many examples over my time as a journalist and an editor and my short time as a member of Parliament.

As for the motion that we are debating here today calling on the government to end its muzzling of scientists, the Conservative government will say that scientists are not being muzzled, that science is not being manipulated. That is not the case.

Back in December, on the floor of the House of Commons during question period, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was questioned about how scientists were reportedly afraid to go public with concerns about cuts to Fisheries and Oceans. In response, the minister asked a question. He asked, "Do I look like a bully?". I was next to speak and I answered the minister's question. I said that the minister did indeed look like a bully, although I later apologized and it was a sincere apology, but I answered his question. The minister does not look like a bully. He looks like a stereotypical Canadian grandfather. That is not how government scientists are bullied, not directly by ministers. It does not work that way. It is not in-your-face bullying. It is not blatant muzzling. It is a lot more subtle than that.

On that particular day in December, when the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans asked whether he looked like a bully, he was responding to questions about how employees fared. They could face sanctions or suspensions for remarks on federal job losses within the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

According to their union, scientists were worried about cuts to Fisheries and Oceans but would not speak for fear of being blacklisted. As with all cuts, the Conservative government said that there would be no negative impact on research, but what else is it going to say? The scientists say otherwise, or they would if they were not going to be blacklisted "for the rest of their lives".

The media policy in place at Fisheries and Oceans Canada is similar to what has been implemented at Environment Canada. Scientists there cannot speak to reporters even about their own research until it is cleared through a network of public relations and even the Prime Minister's Office. Scientist Kristi Miller was recently told not to give interviews about her research on the causes of the

sockeye salmon decline on B.C.'s Fraser River even though her research had been published in *Nature*.

• (1300)

Scott Dallimore, a Natural Resources geoscientist who had an article published in *Nature* about a flood 13,000 years ago in northern Canada, was denied the right to speak to the media until after the media's deadline had elapsed. This is frequently how muzzling occurs.

I was a journalist for 20 years. I was a reporter and I was a persistent one. I was like a dog with a bone. Early in my career, I would be allowed to sit down with a scientist one on one. There was no problem. That was the way it worked. By the end of my career, I was not allowed to sit down with a scientist, even with a public relations official at the scientist's side. I had to submit questions in advance, in writing, and get an official formal response. Are scientists being muzzled? Take it to the bank.

The prestigious British journal *Nature* has written two editorials in the last two years calling on the Canadian government "to set its scientists free". The truth will set us free—not as the Conservatives see it, but as it is: pure, untainted truth.

The Conservatives are taking the art of muzzling to another level. The ultimate muzzling is to eliminate the person being muzzled altogether, to eliminate the position, to eliminate search and data-gathering programs. If under the Liberals we had the decade of darkness, under the Conservatives we have entered another period of dark ages, the darkest of ages, the con age. "Conage" is a new term, according to the *Urban Dictionary*. It means "completely and utterly owned". The Conservative government is attempting to eliminate all opposition and all opposing opinion by eliminating the information at the source. Welcome to the con age.

The Conservative government's Trojan Horse budget makes sweeping cuts to departments, agencies and organizations that engage in research and data collection, meaning that scientific research is being increasingly corralled into demand-driven funding models to serve profit-driven demands from big industry, and big industry is what the Conservative government caters to.

Budget 2012 eliminates the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. By the year's end, funding would be cut to a team of seven smokestack air pollution specialists who crack down on toxic pollution that kills more than 21,000 Canadians a year. Environment Canada will lose 20% of the budget for a key program that checks to see whether the mining industry meets emission standards. The unit of Environment Canada that responds to oil spill emergencies would be dramatically scaled back, and most regional offices would be closed. The list goes on and on. The Conservatives will say that they do not see a trend, but that is because their heads are stuck in the con age.

Business of Supply

The last thing I want to touch on is the proposed elimination of the National Council on Welfare, created in 1962 to provide research on poverty in Canada. The National Council on Welfare has been described by a former director as a friend to the opposition and a royal pain in the butt to a party once it takes government. No wonder it has been eliminated.

I have been wearing a wristband since before the federal election. I have not taken it off. The wristband says, “Make poverty history”. Before making each and every decision as a politician, I ask how the decision will impact the Canadian poor, and the Conservative government should ask itself the same question with respect to the elimination of the National Council on Welfare. This decision will not help Canadians; rather, it will make their plight that much harder.

This past weekend, I held a town hall in my riding to discuss the Conservative Trojan Horse budget. One of the speakers was Chris Hogan, executive director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Network. Chris said something about the Conservative government's gutting of environmental legislation and cuts in general that has stuck with me. He said, “Less science equals less knowledge. It's basically like driving with the lights off”.

The Conservative government is at the wheel of this country, and it is driving full speed with the lights off. Not only that: the Conservative government is eliminating the police, so there is no chance it will be pulled over.

• (1305)

The Conservative government is an accident waiting to happen. Let us make no mistake: there will be a public roadblock in 2015, the Conservative government will be forced off the road and the con age will come to a dead stop.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 15 I was on a panel on *Power Play*, and the host asked the NDP environment critic for something she felt the National Round Table on the Environment advocated—not a carbon tax, but something that was useful and that perhaps the government should have paid attention to.

The host was asking the environment critic to name a report that she used. She responded, “Pulling it off the top of my head like that, I am not sure.”

I would like to ask my colleague opposite which report he would point to.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to speak for the New Democratic critic for the environment. She can speak for herself.

However, I will say this: if there is one quick thing that I could say to the member opposite and to the government opposite, it would be that there has to be balance. There has to be balance in life, there has to be balance in politics and there has to be balance in this country between industrial development and the environment.

The Conservative government has lost that balance.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I note that the hon. member talked about science and about some of the

cuts that were made. He also mentioned 10 years of darkness under the Liberal government.

I would like to inform the member that Technology Partnerships Canada and all of the research that moved us from number seven in the G8 to number one in the G8 came in under the 10 years of Liberal government, and \$10 billion was spent just on the Foundation for Innovation alone.

I want to ask the hon. member a pertinent question. We notice cuts in the water and air quality analysis are going on. I am speaking as a physician, and my concern is that when all these scientists who are monitoring water and air quality are cut, what is going to happen to the safety of the water we drink? How is this going to impact on the health of Canadians across this country and the diseases they will get from drinking non-potable water?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, if cuts are made to basic science research in any area, be it research for air, water, fish, mining or oil and gas development—and the point was made here earlier that science is another word for research—then the environment will suffer, and we as Canadians will suffer in the end. Our knowledge base will not be there, and mistakes will happen.

• (1310)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent speech. I thought his analogy of the Conservative government's wilful dismissal of scientists and scientific information and data is appropriately like driving a car full speed ahead in the dark with our eyes closed.

It also seems that the government does not even want to look in the rear-view mirror. There are massive cuts to libraries and archives. More than 20% of the workforce will be eliminated. The government said it is just getting rid of duplication and modernizing, but apparently only 2% of our archives are digitized, which means that Canadians will lose their history.

Can the member comment about the loss of this important Canadian information?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I like how the member took my analogy one step further.

The Conservatives are like a government driving a car without the lights on and not looking in the rear-view mirror. The member is absolutely right.

In the case of libraries, for example, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans had 11 libraries across the country. That number is being cut to seven. Are most of those libraries digitized? The answer is no, they are not.

What is going to happen with the information in those libraries? It will be lost. What will that mean? That will mean we will not learn by past mistakes. How big are the past mistakes made by consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments? Huge. There were huge environmental mistakes. I am a member from Newfoundland, and the Grand Banks off Newfoundland were utterly destroyed. There were huge mistakes made.

Now the government is going to destroy the libraries. That makes no sense.

Business of Supply

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to this opposition motion today, partially because I spent the better part of my career working in research administration and working at the University of Calgary with some of what I would like say are the greatest scientists in the country. I witnessed first-hand, at ground level, the support that our government has given to research and development across the spectrum of research disciplines. I have also seen first-hand the results of funding that research, which is some of the world-class research that has been published in this country over the last several years.

Today I would like to speak specifically to research at Environment Canada.

As we have said all along, our government recognizes the importance of scientific research. At Environment Canada, science is central to the department's work, promoting a clean, safe and sustainable environment for all Canadians.

As a measure of its commitment, this government has made significant investments in science to support environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker, I should also say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Kitchener—Waterloo.

Last year, Environment Canada spent about \$600 million on science and technology and plans to spend a similar amount this year. These funds support a wide range of research and monitoring activities focused on air, water and wildlife.

Science is the foundation of Environment Canada's work and is central to its performance as a world-class regulator. The department's scientific expertise spans a wide range of fields, including water, air, climate, weather, wildlife, pollution prevention and environmental toxicology. Research and monitoring at Environment Canada generates invaluable data, information, and tools that are central for developing and implementing the policies, regulations and services that help Canadians make decisions about the environment and that protect the environment for present and future generations.

In spite of what the opposition might say, scientific research remains strong at Environment Canada. One way to measure that strength is to look at the scientific publications we have produced. The department's scientists have published, on average, more than 600 peer-reviewed scientific publications per year in recent years. This makes environment Canada a global leader in environmental research. It is also one of the most productive institutions in the world in this field.

Of course, Environment Canada does not do its work in isolation. In fact, the department maintains strong relations with experts in academia and in other international organizations. These collaborations help Environment Canada build synergies, leverage resources and access expertise in other organizations, resulting in the world-class science we need as a country to ensure our environment is clean, safe and sustainable.

In December 2011 the Commissioner of the Environment tabled an audit of environmental science at Environment Canada. The findings of the audit were positive, recognizing that Environment Canada has good systems and practices in place to manage and ensure the quality of its science and that the science performed by the department is being communicated to decision-makers and delivered to meet user needs.

It is true that Environment Canada, like all of government, is reducing its spending in order to contribute to Canada's return to a balanced budget, something that we heard very clearly from Canadians in the last election.

However, the department is doing so in a way that will not compromise environmental protection. Rather, Environment Canada will focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of all of our science activities through improved coordination and streamlined management.

The department has developed an integrated and risk-based approach to environmental monitoring. This would see more resources devoted to issues and areas that pose the greatest risks to our environment. This approach is consistent with the recommendations made by recent reports of the Commissioner of the Environment, and Environment Canada is moving forward by being flexible and adaptable. The department is maintaining the capacity and expertise needed to carry out its mandate.

Let me give members some details.

This year Environment Canada plans to spend nearly \$50 million on water science and technology. This includes activities such as monitoring freshwater quality and studying climate change impacts on aquatic ecosystem health. For example, Environment Canada will spend \$1.5 million this year to track harmful chemicals through the Great Lakes, investigating where they come from and where they end up.

The department also plans to spend nearly another \$50 million on its atmospheric science and technology research this year. This includes key research on emissions from industry and transportation, monitoring greenhouse gas and aerosol emissions and research to support weather prediction. For example, the department will spend more than \$600,000 this year to study the impact of air pollutants in the Arctic. This would help to ensure northern development happens responsibly.

Other important science and technology investments include nearly \$20 million to support the chemical management plan and more than \$7 million on research to maintain and sustain healthy wildlife populations and ecosystem habitat.

●(1315)

Another example is environmental monitoring in the oil sands region. The government recognizes that action is needed to ensure that the oil sands are developed responsibly and in a way that respects the environment. That is why the government has listened to eminent Canadian scientists and experts and is turning that advice into action on this important issue.

This past February, the hon. Minister of the Environment and his Alberta colleague, the minister of environment and water, announced the joint Canada-Alberta implementation plan for oil sands monitoring. This plan commits Canada and Alberta to an integrated environmental monitoring program for the region that is scientifically robust and transparent.

The implementation plan outlines the path forward to enhance the monitoring of water, air, land and biodiversity in the oil sands by sampling more sites for more substances more frequently. It is designed to improve our understanding of the long-term cumulative effects of oil sands development and activities under the plan have already begun.

Data from the new monitoring program and the methods on which it is based will be transparent, supported by necessary quality assurance and will be made publicly available to allow independent scientific assessments and evaluations. In short, the program is founded on external scientific peer review that will encourage informed discussions and analysis on the impact of oil sands development based on factual, high quality scientific information.

Canadians gave us a strong mandate to deliver on our priorities. Scientific research remains central to the work Environment Canada and many other departments within government do. This government is confident that Environment Canada's ongoing science and technology efforts and activities will remain well funded, scientifically robust and focused on those areas which matter most to Canadians.

I would also like to point to the hundreds of millions of dollars that budget 2012 committed to research and development, including basic research. We heard today that perhaps my colleagues opposite had not read that part of the budget. The Association of Universities and Colleges said that it was very supportive of the levels of funding that were included in budget 2012 and our government's focus on research and innovation as a key driver of the economy.

I would also like to speak to some of the other things with regard to scientific research that Environment Canada has been doing over the last six years, including \$1 billion to support clean energy research development demonstration projects, including carbon capture and storage. I saw some of these projects first hand at the University of Calgary. These are projects that look at new technologies to capture carbon in all sorts of different industrial settings and research to look at the viability of sequestration. We are also funding research across the country that looks at clean energy policy. It is not just about the research on the engineering side; it is also about funding research in social sciences and humanities.

Our government values the support of innovation. It is evident. We are attracting some of the key research professionals from across the world. The Canada excellence research chair program is now in its second iteration. It has recruited dozens of some of the brightest minds from around the world to Canada, supported not only through research infrastructure funding, but ongoing operating funding that allows them to bring their research teams to the country.

We are also seeing the economic effects of investment into research and development. I encourage my colleagues opposite to look at that component of the budget, wherein we say that by

Business of Supply

investing in research and development, we know that we can diversify the economy. We have seen that in the transfer of early stage technology through the life cycle of technological development into the marketplace. There are technologies that come through biomedical research, for example, that affect Canadians when they enter the health care system. There is research into how best to deliver primary care.

Our government fundamentally understands that investment in research and development on good policy and scientific outcomes in the environment equals economic growth. We took the findings of the Jenkins panel to heart and that is why we funded the granting councils at record levels. I certainly hope my colleagues opposite will support this rather than just sticking to their talking points.

I asked my colleague opposite a question about the national round table. I certainly hope he and his party will look into these funding principles to find out where they can better apply these funds and better support innovation. That is what our government has been about in budget 2012.

This is probably one of the first budgets in a long time that has seen such a pronounced focus on research and development in innovation. As someone who has spent the better part of my career in the administration of research and who has worked with folks on the ground who conduct our nation's research, I am certainly proud to speak to the budget and the levels of funding that we have established.

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about a strong mandate.

When the government got barely 40% of the vote, and that 40% was obtained through the use of robocalls, I would not consider that a very strong mandate. The government could do with a little modesty and reserve.

We have heard everything she said before. Exactly same thing was said in Ontario before the Walkerton crisis, and that is the problem. When scientists tell us that we are headed towards a wall and a dangerous situation, they are muzzled. The government does not want to hear about the massive environmental deterioration in the far north; it does not want to hear about isolated water problems, and that is the problem.

Why muzzle public servants and scientists who are informing us of an imminent danger that goes against what she is saying?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, by my colleague's math, then over 70% of the population of Canada did not vote for his party. I would ask him to check his figures on that as well.

Business of Supply

He said that what I had said was well known. Absolutely, it is well known. Across the world, our government is becoming known as a place for the brightest minds in the world to come and work. That is a great message to come across. I certainly hope he supports the budget for that reason.

With regard to our scientists, they provide tens of thousands of peer reviewed publications to internationally renowned research journals. How is that muzzling scientists? By supporting research and development in our country, we unleash the potential of scientists across the country. I am proud to support this budget.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the point of this debate today is not so much a chance for the government to rattle off the ways it spends money, but to ask whether it takes seriously the advice of scientists, natural and social scientists in Canada. However, I am pleased to have the chance to ask a question of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment.

To talk to natural scientists and social scientists, namely economists, they will tell us that the government needs to do much more than it currently has done on the issue of climate change. In particular, it needs to do a lot more to compensate for the negative externality, the fact that we do not have to pay for emitting fossil carbon into the atmosphere.

How can the parliamentary secretary talk about supporting scientists when the government will not listen to scientists on something which is probably one of the most important pieces of advice that natural scientists and social scientists have given to the government today?

• (1325)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, as opposed to the party opposite, what our government does is listen to Canadians. In 2008 Canadians clearly said that they did not want a tax on everything. They did not want a carbon tax.

When we talk about economics, we are under a time of fragile economic recovery. As legislators, we need to be cognizant of the fact of new taxes, regressive taxes, that could increase the price of consumer goods across the spectrum. Across the world we see economies suffer because of government policies that are not cognizant of the need to balance the budget and ensure that there are policies in place to grow the economy.

At this point in time, we need to be very careful about looking at taxes that increase the cost of consumer goods across the spectrum.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know in the House it was 13 long years that the previous Liberal government did absolutely nothing and created a huge environmental mess. I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for her hard work in getting things done on the environment.

Environment Canada science was recently audited by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. I understand the commissioner had very positive comments to make about the department's science management. Could the parliamentary secretary elaborate on that?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I also congratulate the member for Langley for his wonderful job in chairing the

environment committee of the House of Commons. He is a great chair.

On his question, the commissioner wrote:

—Environment Canada has incorporated standards of quality and that it uses a range of systems and practices—including peer reviews of scientific publications and accreditation of environmental testing laboratories—to ensure the quality of the science it conducts.

On top of that, I should note that last year Environment Canada scientists published over 684 articles, attended 326 conferences and they did over 1,200 media interviews. Our scientists are busy, they are active and we are proud of them.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to speak to our government's very strong support for both basic and applied research, not only in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo but across the country.

Guided by the 2007 science and technology strategy, we have been systematically enhancing federal support for world-class research and building on Canada's knowledge advantage. The federal government has demonstrated a strong commitment to promote and to prioritize science and technology and build a sophisticated knowledge-based economy. Canada's economic action plan 2012 builds on earlier investments by proposing significant new resources to support leading-edge research and infrastructure through investments that strengthen Canada's position as a leading supporter of research.

Budget 2012 announces \$341 million over two years to support research, education and training. This ongoing support for advanced research has contributed to a very strong system of innovation in our country. We are helping to ensure that Canadian researchers continue to generate new ideas and that businesses have access to the resources they need to bring this knowledge to market and create high quality jobs. That is a goal that we should all share in this House.

Our government has invested significantly at a time when it is needed most. We are building on a record and providing our innovators, our colleges, universities, businesses and industries, with the support they need to work together and create high quality jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity. We have invested in world-class research through our three granting councils, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Through these councils we have introduced such initiatives as the Banting post-doctoral fellowships, the Vanier Canada graduate scholarships and the Canada excellence research chairs. To illustrate this, I would like to highlight that two of the current Canada excellence research chairs have in fact come to Waterloo, to my riding, to pursue their research. Dr. David Cory, who was attracted from MIT, is a leading global innovator in experimental quantum physics and quantum engineering and whose work is already being used in a range of applications from the medical field to the oil industry. Dr. Philippe Van Cappellen, who is a world-leading expert in ecohydrology, came from France to pursue his work in Canada.

Business of Supply

We have systematically enhanced federal support for advanced research. Recent investments are supporting research projects across Canada as well as Canadian involvement in major international research projects. We have continued to support large-scale research in genomics. Since 2000, the Government of Canada has invested more than \$1 billion to ensure that Canada remains at the forefront of this important field, supporting amazing breakthroughs in health and life sciences. In budget 2012, our government announced an additional \$60 million for Genome Canada, helping continue to support research excellence in genomics.

Moreover, we are committed to building a strong and vibrant research environment to strengthen our ability to compete in the knowledge-based economy. We are providing significant support for leading edge research infrastructure. To date, the federal government has allocated \$5.5 billion to the Canada Foundation for Innovation, which has committed support to more than 7,300 projects at 130 research institutions across Canada.

To support the foundation's core activities, the plan announced \$500 million over five years starting in 2014-15. The funding will support new competitions, including the college-industry innovation fund.

• (1330)

Investments are also being made in Canada's ultra high-speed research network, CANARIE, satellite reception facilities and Canada's continued participation in the international space station mission, as well as the Canadian High Arctic Research Station.

In addition, at the University of Waterloo in my own riding, investments in automotive research and development through Automotive Partnership Canada will result in a more efficient and sustainable automotive industry that continues to create jobs for Canadians and provide greener transportation solutions.

I am also proud to highlight another impressive research partnership anchored at the University of Waterloo, the Southern Ontario Water Consortium. Our government is investing almost \$20 million in this project that will strengthen our position as a world leader in clean water technologies, create new jobs and develop solutions for communities across the globe that lack easy access to clean water.

Beyond this, our government is also investing in institutions that are pushing the frontiers of knowledge. I am talking specifically about the Institute for Quantum Computing and the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, which I am proud to say are both in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo.

The Institute for Quantum Computing is a recognized international leader in the field of quantum computing. Our government contributed \$50 million to support the construction of a new state-of-the-art scientific research facility. With the grand opening of the Quantum Nano Centre this fall, IQC will become the world's largest research centre devoted to quantum information science.

In addition, our government is also proud to support the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics. We continue to invest in this world-leading institution. In budget 2011 we announced a further \$50 million over five years to support its leading research, education and public outreach activities. A recent evaluation concluded that the

Perimeter Institute has markedly improved Canada's science capacity and global reputation in the field of theoretical physics.

Investments like these in PI and IQC enable these premier institutions to attract the best researchers from around the world and bring them together in Waterloo to engage in basic scientific research. We have not only reversed the brain drain, we have ensured that Canada is becoming a powerful magnet for talent.

Members may remember the NDP took the unfortunate step of dragging the reputations of the Perimeter Institute, the Auditor General and our government through the mud with its conspiracy theory that the Perimeter Institute received more funding than we committed. The funds received by the Perimeter Institute are consistent with our government's commitments year after year. Unfortunately the press release that makes the false accusations remains on the NDP's website today. This is unfortunate and I do hope that the NDP finally takes the opportunity to apologize.

I should also note that the Government of Canada provided, through budget 2009, \$2 billion for research and advanced learning infrastructure at universities, colleges and CEGEPs through the knowledge infrastructure program. This funding helped leverage an additional \$3 billion in contributions from the provinces, territories and private partners. For example, in my riding this program provided \$25 million to the University of Waterloo to construct facilities for environment, engineering and math research and education.

This is how we are helping industry partners bring technology to market, provide our students with hands-on applied research experience and create a highly skilled Canadian workforce. Taken cumulatively, these measures, along with our efforts to support business innovation, demonstrate this government's support for world-class science, technology and innovation. We are ensuring that Canada continues to lead in the knowledge economy.

• (1335)

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this member has talked about all the investments the government is making. I have often been asked by the government if I support its aerospace research and development, for instance. In February, the Montreal aerospace industry said that there is not enough research and development in the aerospace industry in Canada and that the government should be doing a lot more to make us competitive.

Why does the government not understand that it needs to be putting publicly funded research as a priority in order to increase our innovation and competitiveness internationally?

Business of Supply

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, I find the question from my hon. colleague from the NDP quite interesting and somewhat amusing. This is a member of a party claiming to support the aerospace industry, which is largely based in the Montreal area but has other important aspects of the sector across the country.

This is a sector that is anxious to see the government move forward with our next generation fighter aircraft, and of course the NDP finds every opportunity to oppose that. We have renewed our government's commitment with Canada's involvement in the international space station, and we continue to lead the world in the aerospace industry.

• (1340)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, an internationally famous scientist, Dr. Cynthia Gilmour, is a senior scientist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center who has done research all over the world with her team in mercury, acid rain, acid lakes and climate change. She has used the Experimental Lakes Area for experimentation. She is not from this country. She has no political stake in this. This is what she said in a letter last week to the minister involved, “By shutting down ELA, you remove a critical tool for finding the most reasonable and cost-effective solutions to national and international environmental issues. The small federal investment in the research station has been returned thousands of times over in public, in ecosystem, in human health.”

My question to this hon. member, and to every member on that side of the House is, will they all follow in mindless lockstep in muzzling scientists and killing research, or will a few of them dare to stand up to their party?

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, it is important to point out that with respect to the Experimental Lakes project, our government is looking to transition this particular project to a partner that will take on responsibility for whatever remaining research priorities there may be.

It is important to point out that our science and technology policy, first developed by this government in 2007, is really unprecedented in the Government of Canada's support for science and technology. As part of that, we embrace and we celebrate the work that our Canadian scientists and researchers do in this country, at our universities, for our federal government departments. We will continue to celebrate the excellent work they provide.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the member opposite certainly pointed out some investments that the government has made, I think he has misled us to a certain degree with respect to the exodus of scientists from this country.

The agriculture committee has travelled across Canada on at least one occasion in the last couple of years. All we heard about was the exodus of our scientists to other countries because of the lack of investment by the government in basic science. The agricultural adaptation program was ended completely. It was science-based.

My question to the hon. member is, why would he mislead us like this and suggest that our scientists are staying, when in fact they are leaving this country?

Mr. Peter Braid: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Guelph is clearly out of touch. Under the previous Liberal government, there was a brain drain. Since our government has taken office, there has clearly been a brain gain.

We are attracting some of the world's greatest researchers. Many are coming to my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo. I would be happy to host a visit of the hon. member for Guelph to show him the fantastic research that is taking place, not only at our two universities, Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo, but also at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics and the Institute for Quantum Computing.

He should come on down Highway 7.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is probably a good thing for the member that his time ran out before I had a chance to ask him a question. I would have been asking the member about the RADARSAT Constellation mission. I introduced a motion in the industry committee to have MacDonald, Dettwiler and industry ministry officials come to the committee to explain what has happened with that program and why we are off track. Unfortunately the member opposite who just spoke introduced a motion to take the meeting in camera. I cannot imagine why we would need to discuss such important issues in secret. They concern all Canadians.

I am proud to stand today in defence of science and research. Canada's ability to compete in the 21st century is inextricably linked to science and research. Science and research touch every aspect of our daily lives and must be preserved and enriched. In Canada, we must foster an environment that encourages more research and science. Sadly, the 2012 budget and recent changes by the Conservative government take Canada down a path of darkness rather than enlightenment.

The muzzling of scientists and the assignment of chaperones by the government is repugnant. This has been widely condemned and rightly so. Only ideologues and people afraid of the truth would resort to such actions. If nothing else, scientists must be free to report the findings of their work, free from political interference. They should only need worry about the critiques of their peers, which in the end leads to better scientists. Peer review and not political review must be the standard.

The cuts announced affect far more than I could possibly say in 10 minutes. The Conservative members of the industry, science and technology committee have a much better understanding of just how much I have to say on this issue.

It really is a shame that this morning's meeting was also cancelled and that industry ministry officials were not available to discuss the estimates so that we could learn more about these reckless cuts. We are still looking forward to seeing them and, we hope, the minister before the summer recess.

Business of Supply

The first issue I want to raise is about good government. One might ask why. It is pretty simple. To provide good government, one needs to assemble a tremendous amount of facts, primarily obtained through large quantities of research from places like Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Library and Archives Canada, National Research Council, Statistics Canada, and of course the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada.

I forgot to request to have my time split with the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, so I would like to do that now.

Limiting research at all levels of government and all agencies of government restricts everyone's ability to make fact- and evidence-based policy. This is a critical issue because I cannot possibly see how limiting that information would be a good thing. Yet here we are, debating a motion being brought forward by our science and technology critic and our industry critic.

The seconding by the member for LaSalle—Émard is significant because these cuts also largely touch industry. Cuts to Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans, and the National Research Council affect our ability to monitor industry to ensure adherence to environmental regulations that are there to protect us, the air we breathe and the water we drink. As an aside, I will definitely be taking a pass on drinking tailing pond water. There is absolutely no way, but the Minister of Natural Resources can do as he likes.

Cuts to research and science affect our ability as parliamentarians to make the best policies to foster innovation and economic growth. I am proud to stand as deputy industry critic with our industry critic, our science and tech critics, and all NDP members of this House to say that cuts need to be reversed for the long-term benefits of Canadians. The government needs to knock it off.

A lot of research is done independently and in conjunction with industry that has a great impact on our economy, and that will only grow with time. Cuts to Statistics Canada from the policy-making side and the National Research Council from the innovation side will only hinder our long-term development. The time to invest and not pull back is now.

I would like to address two of the looming cuts in wildly different areas that are of particular concern to me.

● (1345)

The closing of the Experimental Lakes Area, as we have already heard today, is particularly troubling because of its international importance and its repeated successes that have only proven its worth.

I would like to cite from an article in the June 1 *Globe and Mail* about its pending closure:

Former top researchers at the centre say the decision is emblematic of the government's anti-science approach to environmental policy and its emphasis on resource development with little regard for impacts on the ecosystem unless they affect commercially important fish stocks.

"I think they are uninterested in the environment and scientific research into the environment," said John Rudd, who served as chief scientist at ELA and now consults for private labs. "They don't want to see things that might get in the way of promoting industry."

Now a senior scientist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in the United States, Dr. Gilmour, said:

By shutting ELA you remove a critical tool for finding the most reasonable and cost-effective solutions to national and international environmental issues.

She also wrote:

The small federal investment in the research station has been returned thousands of times over in public and ecosystem health.

Frankly, the further we go on, the more I start to believe the government's motto is, "Never let a good policy get in the way of bad decision making".

On a similar note, we have the RADARSAT Constellation mission, where a committed minister and a committed parliamentary secretary say they are on board, but the money is just not in the budget.

This vital Canadian satellite program, with the multi-mission of environmental monitoring, Arctic sovereignty, ocean safety and ice monitoring, and disaster management, as well as the ability to attract other governments and agencies as clients, all makes good business sense and science and safety sense, yet the government has put the program in jeopardy.

What is worse, the government is, unlike what the former member said, precipitating a brain drain from a company that is of such strategic importance to Canada that the government blocked the sale of MacDonald Dettwiler.

Delays in this project could also put Canadian lives at risk. If the Constellation satellites are not in space before RADARSAT-2's end of mission, we could have a coverage gap, and that would put Canadians' lives at risk. It is critical that the situation not be allowed to occur or to continue. The government needs to get off the mat.

These and many other reasons are why we are calling upon all parliamentarians to support and adequately fund these agencies and programs because the return is better government through a fact-based evidence policy, a better and stronger economy that has fewer negative impacts on the environment, through science and innovation dependent from and in conjunction with industry. It is as simple as that.

The cuts just go on and on in this budget, as we mentioned, with several different agencies. The cuts that are happening at Environment Canada and ozone monitoring and with the Arctic monitoring stations, they just have absolutely no basis to be there. These are the programs that keep us safe. They are the programs that keep our air clean. They are the programs that keep our water drinkable. They need to be given the appropriate amount of funds in order to continue to keep us safe. As well of course, on the innovation side, which is very important to me, we certainly need to do a lot more in order to foster innovation and productivity, not a lot less, which is what the government proposes.

Statements by Members

There are also disturbing reports that hundreds of small and medium-sized enterprises have disappeared from Canada in the last several years. Of course, these are companies that, by and large, are more productive. They contribute more heft to the Canadian economy than their sizes would indicate. Yet they are disappearing because there is a lack of investment, there is a lack of opportunities, they are being gobbled up by larger enterprises or the unbalanced approach that the government has taken to the economy has put them out of business.

I could, of course, go on for another 20 or 30 minutes, or maybe a couple of hours, as I may or may not do in committee before long, but I will leave it at that. I look forward to hearing what the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has to say.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member tell me why the Conservatives have decided to eliminate the National Council of Welfare? This organization gives advice to the federal government on how to best improve the living conditions of low-income Canadians. In addition, it only costs about \$1 million, which is 10% of what the Conservatives are planning to spend on advertising in their budget.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question, since it is definitely a topic that I did not have time to address.

I personally do not see why they think it makes sense to cut the program, given that the research conducted by the council helps parliamentarians make better legislation, creating more opportunities for the poorest people in the country.

In my view, the only reason that explains why the Conservatives want to eliminate the National Council of Welfare is that they are afraid of what information we might find.

• (1355)

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am aware that the hon. member is very knowledgeable on this matter, as the former science and technology critic and current industry critic.

It is interesting that, on the one hand, we are talking about reducing the number of scientists, muzzling them and preventing them from speaking, and, on the other hand, we often hear arguments about how much it costs the public to keep these “bureaucrats”. In reality, these scientists provide us with data that can help us create good laws and govern properly, which will reduce the costs of environmental damage in the long term.

Keeping these scientists on the job will permit us to introduce legislation to ensure that the next generation can count on a healthy environment with all the benefits that go with it. Could the hon. member expand on that?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

Most certainly, the challenge is even greater for young people, who will have to work until age 67 because of the changes, meaning

two years more than previously, or perhaps more, because they will first have to wait for new job opportunities.

Specifically, changes are currently being made to the economy and we need an educated labour force, but education itself is far too expensive. In addition, the job opportunities need to be there once they complete their studies.

Cuts to innovation, science and technology will harm the industry and young people, who will not be able to find jobs and will not be able to help improve the world. We do not know what the scientists of the future are going to discover. The fact is that we must give them the opportunity to do so.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what impact does the hon. member think the Conservatives' research and development policy will have on our country's future?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' research and development policy will be detrimental in a number of ways. If there are fewer opportunities, fewer people will pursue a career in science and technology, thereby limiting innovation and invention. We need to lend our support to a large number of scientists to ensure that discoveries are made in health, the environment and industry.

The oil sands are problematic. A lot of work in science and research still needs to be done in that area, so that the oil sands will not harm the environment, as they currently do.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

“MP FOR A DAY” COMPETITION

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the sixth winner of the “MP for a Day” competition, Samuel Daigle, experienced a memorable day on Parliament Hill last week. The student at the Cégep de Victoriaville attended the Bloc Québécois caucus, met the Minister of Foreign Affairs and members of Parliament from the other parties, and participated in an interview on CPAC, among other things.

This competition, organized with the political science and geography teacher, Jean-François Léonard, helps demystify the job of a politician, gives a behind-the-scenes look and helps the student become more familiar with our democratic mechanisms.

I would like to thank my colleagues and everyone else who took time to explain their jobs to Samuel and who welcomed him warmly. Although he maintains a necessary critical eye, I think he now has a much different perspective of the job we do.

I would also like to thank the partners who make this competition possible: Équipe Sévigny-Baril from Via Capitale, the UPA Centre-du-Québec and the Association générale des étudiants et étudiantes du cégep de Victoriaville.

Statements by Members

● (1400)

*[English]***ERIN DOYLE**

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 25, the community of Kamloops held a commemoration service for Master Corporal Erin Doyle. His name was added to the cenotaph in Kamloops, joining those who died in the cause of freedom.

Master Corporal Doyle served our nation and the Afghan people with distinction over the course of three tours of duty. It was with great sadness that we learned in 2008 that he was killed in action during a Taliban attack.

Beyond his role as a soldier, we also remember him as an irreplaceable man who was loved and cherished. He was truly our “local boy done good”, starting his career as a reservist in our Rocky Mountain Rangers.

In his military career, he not only worked to safeguard Canadian communities, but to assist people halfway around the world in rebuilding theirs. This was a role he willingly took on in the hope of making a difference, and he paid the ultimate price.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, we salute the life and legacy of Master Corporal Erin Doyle.

* * *

*[Translation]***FESTIVALS IN VAUDREUIL-SOULANGES**

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to invite all Canadians and Quebeckers to take on the pleasant task of supporting the local tourism industry this summer. More specifically, I would like to draw the attention of my colleagues to what is happening in my riding.

On June 10, I invite my colleagues to take part in the very first S. O.U.P.E. festival, a free festival that provides an opportunity to bring generations and cultures together. From June 22 to 25, there is the Vaudreuil-Dorion circus festival, the first international circus competition of its kind in Canada. What is more, it is a carbon-neutral event.

[English]

Then there is the Hudson Music Festival, which will be held from July 31 to August 5.

[Translation]

Finally, the 28th Maison Trestler summer festival will hold concerts all summer long.

This summer, let us support the events in our regions. Let us travel at home.

*[English]***CITIZENSHIP ACT**

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently introduced Bill C-425, an act to amend the Citizenship Act (honouring the Canadian armed forces).

First, it outlines another pathway to integration for permanent residents. Second, it underscores the incredible worth of Canadian citizenship. Third, it honours the contribution of our brave men and women in uniform.

According to the bill, permanent residents who sign a three-year contract with the Canadian armed forces would receive a one year credit toward citizenship. Additionally, a Canadian who commits an act of war against the Canadian armed forces would be deemed to have renounced his or her Canadian citizenship.

To serve Canada in our military is a patriotic act of service worthy of reward. Conversely, to commit an act of war against Canada's armed forces signals a clear rejection of Canadian responsibilities, values and citizenship.

In the coming months, I ask for support from all sides of this House for the bill.

* * *

WORLD OCEANS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with every breath we take, every drop of water we drink, human beings are connected to the ocean. They are our life support system, give us more than half the oxygen we breathe, regulate our climate, provide invaluable resources and are an endless source of magic and mystery for the human spirit.

Eighty percent of the world's population lives within 100 kilometres of an ocean and three and a half billion people depend on the oceans, for food, yet, scientists estimate that up to one-third of commercial fisheries are overfished, climate change is making oceans warmer and more acidic, and a mere half a percent of global marine habitats are protected. We have work to do.

June 8 is World Oceans Day, a great opportunity to celebrate oceans, but our aim must be to protect them as a way of life. That is why this year's theme, “Youth: The Next Wave for Change”, is so critical. We welcome young people's creativity and innovative ideas so that we can truly sustain oceans as they sustain us.

* * *

D-DAY

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, June 6, will mark the 68th anniversary of D-Day when nearly 25,000 Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen stormed Juno Beach in Normandy and helped to turn the tide of the Second World War.

Our troops would pay a brutal cost to begin the liberation of Europe, with 5,400 Canadian graves in Normandy, the highest in the British army group.

Statements by Members

I am very proud to have several D-Day veterans in my riding of Perth—Wellington, men like Chief Warrant Officer Art Boon and Battery Sergeant Major Stuart Jeffra, who landed with the 19th Field Regiment, as well as Chief Warrant Officer Bill Broughton and Corporal Ray Huras, who landed with the Highland Light Infantry.

Canada has always been a peaceful nation, but our warriors have always brought an equal measure of determination and courage to battle when peace or freedom is at stake.

I know hon. members will join with all Canadians in recognizing our D-Day veterans.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this World Environment Day, I would like to congratulate all those who are taking real action to protect the environment.

[English]

This year, supported by their devoted principal and teachers, about 30 students participated in the CFER program at Riverdale High School.

Thanks to their skills, to the stockrooms and machines in their school, as well as to the good co-operation they maintain with different companies, these students recycle televisions and computer systems. With the Caravan project, they also visit elementary schools to raise awareness about the environment and recycling.

They can be proud of the important work they do for our community.

[Translation]

Other initiatives also deserve to be recognized, including: the Pierrefonds-Roxboro Éco-quartier, which demonstrates leadership in waste management and in the cleanliness and beautification of our community; the Ferme Bord-du-Lac, which provides local, organic produce to people from the region; and the City of Dollard-des-Ormeaux, which offers an organic waste collection service.

There is still much to be done, but in my riding we are taking real action for the environment and we can be proud of that.

* * *

[English]

GEORGE ABDALLAH

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a touch of personal sadness that I rise today to remember prominent Pembroke citizen George Abdallah, who passed away this week.

George was a public man, in business, politics and community service.

“Trader George” joined his father in business in the early fifties, running a furniture and appliance business in Pembroke “at the block at the bridge”.

A member of the Pembroke City Council from 1963 to 1972 and then mayor from 1972 to 1974, George impressed upon me the importance of every single voter, as he missed being returned to office as mayor by less than a handful of votes. I valued his counsel.

Always active in politics, he was my driver in the last two federal elections.

George went on to serve over 20 years on the local hydro commission.

George was very active in charitable activities, as a one-time member of the Kiwanis, the Masonic Lodge and the Shriners. As a member of the Ottawa Valley Shrine Club, George could be seen on its float every Santa Claus parade.

On behalf of the community, I ask his wife of 57 years, Joan, and his children, Kathryn, Sandra and Brian, to please accept our appreciation of George of a life well-lived.

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ALS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, June is ALS Awareness Month.

ALS, also known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is a rapidly progressive fatal motor neuron disease that affects approximately 3,000 Canadians.

My father succumbed to ALS a number of years ago and, as a result of my very personal encounter with this devastating disease, I reintroduced my private member's bill last year to have June officially designated as national ALS month.

I commend the ALS Society of Canada for its tireless work in increasing awareness among Canadians, in funding research to find a cure and in providing quality care for those affected.

I encourage each member to wear a cornflower today to show their support in the fight against ALS. I also invite all hon. members to attend this evening's ALS reception in the parliamentary restaurant to learn more.

Together we can find a cure.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to salute the staff of Rights and Democracy, a great Canadian organization that will, unfortunately, be closing its doors in July.

[Translation]

Rights and Democracy was created in 1988 by an act of Parliament that received unanimous approval. Its mandate was to promote respect for human rights and the development of democracy abroad. It was doing exceptional work in many places, including some of the most dangerous areas of the world.

The organization is being abolished, but as Jean-Louis Roy, former president of Rights and Democracy, told me recently, the organization is not dying. It will live on through all those it has helped throughout the world.

[*English*]

I will be hosting a non-partisan reception for the staff of Rights and Democracy on the Hill on June 14. I invite all my fellow MPs to attend this reception and to join me in thanking the employees of Rights and Democracy for their service.

* * *

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has an excellent track record when it comes to job creation and economic growth. Over 750,000 jobs have been created since 2009. Our most recent budget is the next phase of our plan for job creation and long-term prosperity in Canada.

Given that the global economic recovery remains fragile, particularly in Europe, Canadians want the government to focus on what matters most. That is exactly what our government is doing through the implementation of our economic action plan.

This is the longest debate that any budget bill has had in the House and in committee in nearly two decades. It is high time that the NDP made the economy a priority instead of playing partisan procedural games.

Why do the leader of the NDP and his party always side with the interests of radical activists rather than the interests of honest, hard-working Canadians?

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mr. Wayne Hanley, national president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada; Mr. Mark Dobson, regional director for Atlantic Canada; and Mr. Tim Hosford, as well as all members of the UFCW across the country.

Last year, they had another record-breaking fundraising year for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, raising over \$2 million. To date, UFCW Canada has raised over \$23 million for leukemia and lymphoma research in Canada, making UFCW Canada the number one donator to this very important cause.

On behalf of the House of Commons on both sides, we congratulate UFCW Canada and all its membership for their fantastic work, one day hoping to find a cure for that terrible scourge of leukemia and lymphoma disease in this country. We congratulate UFCW Canada and thank its members for their continued efforts in this regard.

Statements by Members

RODOLFO QUEZADA TORUNO

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs) offered our sincere condolences to the government and the people of Guatemala on the death of Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruno today.

Cardinal Quezada Toruno led Guatemala's National Reconciliation Commission from 1987 to 1993 and later negotiated the peace agreement signed in December 1996. That brought the end of Guatemala's 36-year civil war. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Guatemala on this very sad day.

Our government is actively engaged with our partners in the Americas to help ensure a prosperous, safer and more democratic hemisphere. Continuing in the cardinal's good work in Guatemala, we are proud to announce today that Canada and Guatemala are working together to strengthen security at the Guatemala-Belize border to help facilitate the peace process between these two countries and increase their capacity to stop the flow of organized crime.

We look forward to continuing this important work with Guatemala and throughout the Americas.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RUGBY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday on Parliament Hill, I had the pleasure of participating in a demonstration of the best sport in the world: rugby. Of course, you know because you were there too.

The match was staged to promote the sport and enabled many Canadians to discover the beauty of a game that unites agility and physical contact. This marvellous sport is not well known in Canada but deserves to be.

[*English*]

Yesterday's game showcased what, in essence, makes rugby so great. Media personalities, politicians and players from the Canadian rugby squad were all out for a good time. People tall, short, young and old were all donning a jersey.

As with all events, there is always one mishap. Yours truly was given a jersey that seems to have been shrunk even though the sizing label was correct. Two of Canada's greatest rugby players were also on hand and both were given the task of having to do what they were not trained to do. My buddy, Al Charron, was given a task to coach yours truly and my friend, Gareth Rees, was given the task of refereeing. Everyone was a winner.

Our thanks go out to the organizers and sponsors of the event, the CRU. I wish all members of the Seniors Men's Canadian Rugby Team good luck in the three important games they will play in the next few weeks.

*Oral Questions***THE BUDGET**

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has a proven track record of creating jobs and economic growth across the country.

Since July 2009, Canada's economy has created over 750,000 net new jobs, 90% of those being full-time. Our government's economic policies have made Canada an island of stability in a troubled global economy. As the global economy remains fragile, especially in Europe, Canadians want their government to focus on what matters. That is exactly what we would do in implementing economic action plan 2012.

Unfortunately, the NDP members continue to play partisan procedural games to obstruct our job-creating budget bill. The NDP members are proposing dangerous economic experiments, job-killing taxes and reckless spending we simply cannot afford. They continue to put narrow special interests and activists ahead of ordinary Canadians.

When will the NDP members stop the political games and support our plan to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity?

* * *

• (1415)

D-DAY

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we will celebrate the 68th anniversary of one of the greatest acts of bravery in the history of the Canadian Forces: the Normandy landings. It will be the occasion to honour thousands of men and women who fought courageously.

I had the great pleasure of participating in such a commemoration in Etobicoke last Sunday. Unfortunately, none of my colleagues from the other parties were present to thank these veterans for their tremendous sacrifices. Instead, they were slinging mud at one another, even phone canvassing.

Celebrations like the one in Etobicoke should put all politics aside. Thousands of Canadians fought hard to preserve our ideals. They deserve that we take the time to stand above partisanship to thank them.

I hope that the next time we celebrate the incredible efforts of the veterans of Etobicoke, my colleagues from the other parties will be standing beside me, thankful for everything that the men and women of the Canadian Forces did 68 years ago to ensure that we can still stand here in this House in a free and democratic country.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that our country has been blessed with a wealth of natural resources. It is upon these gifts that millions of Canadians have built their careers and homes in support of their families, all the while creating economic growth for our country.

A recent study from the Conference Board of Canada shows that Canada's resource sectors are creating jobs and growth across the country in many different industries, including the manufacturing

industry. Unfortunately, the NDP leader attacked Canada's resource sectors by calling them a "disease". In an attempt to divide Canadians, he is attacking key economic drivers in Canada.

For the Leader of the Opposition, the resource industries, such as forestry, minerals and mining, conventional oil, natural gas, coal and oil sands in my province and in my riding are not a disease.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives promised ships, planes and vehicles for the Canadian armed forces. They promised to repair search and rescue craft in British Columbia. The Conservatives knew full well that they could not keep those promises. They did not have the money to keep them. National Defence officials had made that clear to them.

Why did the Conservatives not tell the truth about their military procurement strategy? Why did they fail to respect taxpayers?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we told the truth and we took action to rebuild our armed forces. While we were doing that, the NDP and the Liberal Party opposed our efforts to get the equipment that our men and women in uniform need to do their jobs to defend Canada.

Our government has made historic investments, unprecedented in modern Canadian history, to give Canada's men and women in uniform the equipment and resources they need.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from the helicopters to the F-35 fiasco, Canadians are well aware of the Conservative' litany of failures and half truths on military procurement. On the F-35, costs were lowballed. The process was rigged from the start. Now the government is doing damage control because of a scathing Auditor General's report.

Now we learn that the entire Conservative defence plan has been mismanaged and is over budget. The minister was told last year by his own department that his plan was "unaffordable". Why did the Conservatives hide the fact that their defence plan was unaffordable from the public?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that no government in the modern history of Canada has done more to invest in giving the equipment necessary to our men and women in uniform. For example, we delivered four C-17 Globemasters and seventeen C-130J Hercules. We have delivered unmanned aerial vehicles to support our soldiers in Afghanistan, over 1,000 new medium support vehicles and Leopard 2 tanks.

The government has consistently reacted to support our men and women in uniform, giving them the modern equipment they need. At every step of the way, the NDP and Liberals have opposed our efforts to invest in our military.

• (1420)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer again misses the point. The Conservatives were told by officials a year ago that their entire military plan was "unaffordable". One of the main reasons is the mismanagement of the F-35 and the Chinook purchase.

The minister himself was more interested in photo ops than running his department. The Conservatives' F-35 photo op cost taxpayers \$50,000 and the fake plane had to be trucked in all the way from Texas.

How far back will ship, vehicle and aircraft purchases now be delayed as a result of the government's mismanagement?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the announcement to replace Canada's aging CF-18 fleet was considered significant and necessary to ensure public media and industry awareness. The cost of this announcement had been reported in many ways, including previous responses to written questions.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have billions in procurement mismanagement, tens of thousands squandered on a photo op and the whole defence plan now back to the drawing board. What incompetence. When the defence minister was caught red-handed using a search and rescue helicopter to fly out on a vacation, he expected military staff to cover up for him. Today we learned the minister's office even had the gall to chastise the military for not defending his reputation properly.

My question is simple. What exactly was so lacklustre about the military's response to the minister's questionable activities?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these questions have been answered over and over again. The reality still remains that if it were up to the NDP, our military men and women would have no assets whatsoever.

The issue here is that we are doing the best we can under the circumstances to provide our men and women the tools they need to do their job. Issues of use of military assets is up to the men and women of the military.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, spending \$47,000 on a photo op is not responsible management.

However, that is not the worst of it: not only did the Minister of National Defence have a military helicopter fly him back from a fishing camp, but his employees criticized the Canadian Forces for not properly defending the minister.

I served in the armed forces. I was responsible for defending my country, not the minister's reputation.

Why does the minister believe that the military should clean up his mess?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody is denying the contribution made by the hon. member opposite to the Canadian Forces. However, there is a strong professional relationship between the Canadian Forces and the minister's office. The Canadian Forces are responsible for human resources within their organization.

With respect to the trip in question, it has been answered many times before.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question on the economy that I would like to ask the Minister of Finance. He will know perfectly well that one of the things that happens when there are significant layoffs in the manufacturing sector is that those layoffs often affect apprentices more than they affect anyone else. He will also know the very significant problem we have with respect to skill shortages right across the country.

Could the Minister of Finance tell us this. When it comes to the youth unemployment question and the youth employment question, here is a very practical issue. What will the government do to protect the number of apprentices who are now at work in the economy in Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the investments we are making in helping young Canadians get the skills they need to do the jobs of today and the future. That is why we introduced the apprenticeship incentive grant, the completion grant for apprentices, and also incentives for employers to hire and keep them.

We also expanded the Canada summer jobs program so young people could get the experience for the jobs they needed. As well, in the budget, which the House is debating right now, there are an additional \$50 million to help youth get the experience they need for the jobs that are in high demand.

We hope the opposition and the Liberals support that effort to help our young people.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that has nothing to do with the main issue: layoffs that are primarily affecting young people and apprentices. That is the real problem we now have in Canada's manufacturing sector as a result of such layoffs. It also brings to mind the inequality crisis and the equality crisis in the real economy.

Oral Questions

Where is the government's plan to ensure that there will still be well-paying jobs instead of the layoffs we have been seeing for some time?

• (1425)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a growing economy will create equal opportunities for all Canadians, including young Canadians. Under this government, 750,000 new jobs have been created in Canada over the past two years. That is the best job creation record in the developed world. The Conservatives will continue to focus on economic growth and job creation for all Canadians of all ages.

[*English*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one can always throw the numbers around, but the key question around it has to do with the manufacturing strategy, the manufacturing unemployment that is facing the country.

The fact is that our main trading partner and our main economic partner, the United States, is putting tens of billions of dollars into a manufacturing strategy and tens of billions of dollars into creating new green jobs. It is putting tens of billions of dollars into ensuring that mandates stay in the United States.

Where is the manufacturing strategy for Canada to ensure that—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now we know the Liberal economic plan is to spend tens of billions of dollars on everything.

The country to which he refers is running a deficit of over a trillion dollars, while this country is on track to balance the budget within two years. We have the lowest deficit and lowest debt in the developed world. We have the lowest federal tax burden as a share of the economy since 1964. We have seen the creation of over 750,000 net new jobs with the best job creation record in the developed world thanks to having the world's best Minister of Finance.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MINISTERIAL EXPENDITURES

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for days silence has reigned among the Conservative ranks on the changes to the Minister of International Cooperation's travel expense claims for her trips to Korea, Haiti and Africa. I am not talking about the expense claim from her trip to London. I am talking about new expense claims.

The Conservatives should re-record their message to make it at least appear as though they are answering the questions about these changes. Taxpayers have the right to know what the Conservatives are trying to hide from them.

Why these changes? When will they provide answers?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have answered that question

many times. The answer remains the same: only appropriate expenses were paid for by the government.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons insists on repeating that only appropriate expenses were reimbursed, let us talk about his expenses.

In January 2011, he went parading around Davos, you know, where cuts to old age security were announced. He was accompanied by the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance. In just a few days, the three musketeers of wasteful spending racked up \$20,000 in limousine costs. For that price, they could buy a car and carpool.

Is that what the government House leader means by appropriate expenses?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance, the President of the Treasury Board and the Prime Minister go to represent us on the world stage, we are very proud because they are telling the story of Canada's economic success.

It is a success that is second to none among the major developed economies. It is the reason we are leading, with the lowest debt of any of those major economies and the strongest economic growth of any of those major economies. It is why the kind of people who go to Davos are bringing investments into Canada to create jobs here in Canada for Canadians.

That is our priority, job creation for Canadians.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now we know why the House leader is so bullish on defending the minister of luxurious living: it is because he shares her same sense of entitlement.

We learned that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board racked up \$23,000 for two days of joyriding in Davos. This sense of privilege is unconscionable when they have the nerve to tell Canadians that the cupboard is bare.

Enough of treating taxpayers like chumps. Will the minister pay the money back?

• (1430)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the opportunity in Davos to present Canada's economic success story is a critically important one for Canada.

I know that if the NDP were in government, it would not have to worry about it, because Canada would not be there with an economic success story to deliver. However, we make no apologies for being there to make sure that those who want to invest, those who want to see economic growth, those who are looking for the best place in the world to invest are following the lead of people like those in the Economist Intelligence Unit, who have said that Canada is exactly that.

Oral Questions

They are coming to hear the story delivered by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and others about why Canada is the best place to create jobs.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not expect an apology, because the ministers seem to think that should be entitled to act like the Habsburg dynasty as soon as they leave Canada.

This is the latest issue of lack of accountability. When we have the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, who have—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has the floor.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, obviously we have touched a nerve here, because the Minister of Finance, the Muskoka minister, and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the three musketeers, have the nerve to preach austerity while whooping it up like royalty off the taxpayers.

Will one of those men do the right thing? Will this member do the right thing? Will they stand up and pay the money back?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, Davos is an opportunity where those who are looking to invest, those who are looking to create jobs around the world, have an opportunity to meet.

In the case of the Minister of Finance and the Minister of International Trade, there are opportunities for literally dozens of bilateral meetings with not just other counterparts in terms of trade and the economy around the world but also with investors.

That is why they are going there. They go to hear about Canada's economic success story and to make decisions about where they are going to invest and where they are going to create their jobs. They can do that anywhere in the world.

We are there to make sure that when they make those choices, they choose to come to Canada to create jobs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): My goodness, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that those ministers have been spending too much time in their ivory gazebos.

We just learned that they wasted \$20,000 on transportation for a few days in Davos. At the same time, they are cutting parking for federal public servants. They do not even know what parking is because they have drivers on standby 24 hours a day.

Can the minister explain why it is more appropriate to spend tens of thousands of dollars on limousines than it is to provide parking to federal employees?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the vehicles that were utilized in Davos, it should be underscored that the cars were utilized to transport not just ministers but also staff and departmental officials. Those vehicles were booked by the department, not by the ministers' offices, and they were booked following a competition.

Davos has limitations. It requires that when attending the conference, all vehicles must fit a certain profile. They have to be green vehicles.

The question that the NDP is putting forward is one suggesting that Canada should not be there. We believe that Canada should be there, representing our place on the world stage as economic leaders.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, only the Conservatives would consider parking spaces a luxury when they have drivers on standby 360 days a year. Only the Conservatives consider EI and OAS as non-essential when they spend their time in luxury junkets on the taxpayer's dime. The President of the Treasury Board is asking Canadians to do without essential services, but then he turns around and spends \$20,000 to be driven around Switzerland. That is totally unacceptable.

Will he back down on his reckless cuts and cut his own entitlements instead?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is revealing its plan here. Its plan is that Canada should not be there attracting investment on the world—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1435)

The Speaker: Order, please. The government House leader has the floor.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the NDP plan is that Canada should not be there on the world stage, that we should not be meeting with potential investors, that we should not be telling Canada's economic success story.

The fact is that our number one priority is jobs and the economy. That is why we will continue to promote Canada's success on the world stage and that is why we will ensure that those who are looking to invest and create jobs know that Canada is the best place in the world to do that.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a couple of months ago, the citizenship and immigration minister stood in the House and blamed civil servants for a botched citizenship ceremony staged for TV. Now we discover the truth: that the network and the minister's department knew that the "oath fakers" were actually government employees. The minister blamed officials while in fact his office knew the truth.

Will the minister now admit the truth and apologize to the citizenship employees he blamed for his scheme?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year we have dozens of special ceremonies, including many that are televised, including on the CBC, for example. At every one of those ceremonies, Canadian citizens, including public servants, reaffirm their loyalty to Canada through the oath.

Oral Questions

In this particular instance, the documents that have come to light today reconfirm that in fact I and my office were not aware of the fact that there were only a few new citizens sworn in at that ceremony. In fact, this reconfirms what we have said.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, citizenship ceremonies are solemn and significant, as is ministerial accountability, but the minister has made a mockery of them both. After pressuring his department to rush a ceremony, the minister then insisted he was duped by civil servants. We now know the minister and his political staff knew the truth.

Why did the minister mislead Canadians, and will he apologize for his involvement in this embarrassing fiasco?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): I did no such thing, Mr. Speaker. The member should apologize for the tone of that outrageous question. The reality is that every year we have dozens of special ceremonies, some of which are televised. In this instance, officials reaffirmed their citizenship, which, by the way, they do all the time at ceremonies. The fact of the matter is that the documents that have been released today demonstrate that neither I nor my office were aware of the fact that most of the people participating in that particular ceremony were officials.

In any event, we are strengthening the value of Canadian citizenship and we are proud of our record in that respect.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, citizenship ceremonies are a key part of the process to become a new Canadian citizen. They should not be a partisan tool. Yet the minister did not hesitate to use them as a vulgar backdrop for political purposes.

Together with a television network, the minister's communications team organized the broadcast of a ceremony featuring departmental employees. Then they tried to bury the story.

When will the minister formally apologize for his role in this matter?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly the NDP does not understand that citizenship reaffirmation ceremonies take place every year and that some of them are televised. In fact, many of these special ceremonies have been broadcast by CBC. It is completely normal for Canadians, including government officials, to reaffirm their loyalty to Canada during such ceremonies.

As to whether it is difficult for new citizens to attend these ceremonies, I was not aware of that, and neither were the people in my office.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's refusal to implement mandatory drug shortage reporting puts the health and safety of Canadians at risk.

Now it is failing to protect our interests in trade talks with Europe. Provinces fear that the increase in cost will be \$3 billion if the Conservatives cave to demands to increase patent protection for brand name pharmaceuticals.

Why are the Conservatives so incompetent on these files? Why are they negotiating a deal that could drive up medical bills for provinces, employers and individual Canadians?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's question and I listened to other questions from members of his party. They continue to try to mislead the public on what is really happening with the negotiations with the European Union.

The reality is that the negotiations will exclude public services such as public health, public education and social services. It will not drive up the cost of health care. It is just sheer nonsense.

* * *

• (1440)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, politicizing bureaucrats is bad enough, but now we learn the government was deceiving Canadians about the fake citizenship ceremony. The whole mess began when the minister ordered bureaucrats to stage the event, ignoring their advice to simply film an existing ceremony.

It now turns out that the minister's line that bureaucrats deceived the network was not true, and they knew all along these were not real new citizens.

Why did the minister deceive Canadians and try to make public servants take the blame for this fiasco?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did no such thing. The reality is that every year there are dozens of special citizenship ceremonies, many of them produced specifically—

The Speaker: Order. The minister has the floor. We will have order.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, many of them are produced specifically for broadcast on television networks, as was the case in this instance.

Many of the special ceremonies are in fact reaffirmation ceremonies. At every citizenship ceremony, Canadians are invited to reaffirm citizenship, including public servants. In this case, public servants could not get enough new Canadians to fill the studio, so some of them reaffirmed their citizenship, which is perfectly normal and legitimate—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

*Oral Questions***SEARCH AND RESCUE**

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, apparently the Minister of National Defence was mightily upset with the lacklustre defence offered by the Chief of the Defence Staff concerning his inappropriate use of a search and rescue helicopter. On the other hand, when the CDS was questioned about his use of military aircraft, his support from the minister was tepid indeed.

However, unlike the minister, the CDS manned up and answered each and every question patiently and thoroughly, a model that should commend itself to the minister.

When will the minister man up and answer the public's questions about his inappropriate use of a search and rescue helicopter?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a strong professional relationship between the Canadian Forces and the minister's office, as I stated earlier.

The Canadian Forces are responsible for human resources within that organization. With respect to the trip in question, that question has been answered many times before.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians of all political stripes are now condemning the Conservatives' tactics.

At the convention last weekend in Saskatoon, the FCM passed a motion critical of the Conservative Trojan Horse budget bill. Mayors from coast to coast to coast are voicing their concerns about the gutting of environmental protections, because they know that when something goes wrong, they will be the ones to pay the price.

When will Conservatives start listening to cities and communities and finally agree to split the budget bill?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was at the convention of FCM last weekend in Saskatoon.

What I heard is that they are so proud of what we have done together. They have supported what we delivered about infrastructure. We are the government that invested the most in Canadian history to help them to replace infrastructure and support them. That is what I heard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a lot can happen in a week. While hundreds of organizations oppose Bill C-38 because of its despicable content, now mayors from across Canada also oppose it, because the government likes to cut corners when the time comes to consult Canadians. Among other things, the mayors want all changes to legislation on the environment and on fisheries to be properly examined in committee, so that Canadians' voices can be heard.

Will the government stop going it alone and start listening to the municipalities?

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, of course we are always happy to listen to the municipalities. I had the pleasure of meeting with the board of directors last week and giving a speech to the 1,600 representatives. A number of mayors came to see me afterwards to tell me how much they appreciate the support our government has provided in the past to the municipalities in replacing aging infrastructure.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Denis Lebel: It is interesting to hear laughter from the people whose party voted against that.

Our government has done more for the municipalities than any other government in Canadian history. And we have good news: we will continue to do the same, since we are building a new infrastructure plan.

* * *

● (1445)

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that they are making cities pay the price for Conservative mismanagement. Shame on that minister.

My question is about the Conservative mismanagement of retirement security. Last month, private Canadian pension plans experienced one of the biggest slides on record. The funds lost all of the gains of the past year. This volatility is yet another example of why the Conservatives' reckless pooled registered pension plan scheme will not provide Canadians with retirement security.

When will they stop playing with the retirement security of Canadians? When will they stop playing retirement roulette?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, opposition members would actually have the opportunity to answer their own question pretty soon, because we actually have a piece of legislation that is willing and able to help 60% of the people in the workforce who do not now have a pension plan. That is an incredible number of people.

NDP members have chosen to ignore the 60% of people in the workforce who do not have a pension. They complain about not helping those people who are looking towards retirement. That is what they are doing, voting against seniors, voting against people who want to build a retirement package.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): That is not true, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that the Conservative plan is leaving Canadian seniors vulnerable. It is a disgrace.

Private Canadian pension plans have as little as 70¢ available for every dollar owed to retirees. This instability threatens Canadian retirement security. It is long past time to invest more in the stable, secure and predictable Canada pension plan.

Oral Questions

When will the Conservatives expand the CPP and give Canadians a truly secure retirement savings option?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the NDP has not done its homework. Its members do not understand the jurisdictional differences.

We do not have the jurisdiction to change the Canada pension plan whatsoever without the support of the provinces. We have actually consulted with the provinces and they have said that they support the pooled registered pension plan framework that we are putting forward. They do not all support increasing taxes on businesses and on employers, and that would be by increasing CPP at this time.

It is very important. Canadians are supporting this and most of the provinces are supporting it. It is too bad the NDP does not.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are increasingly concerned about illicit drugs being imported into Canada. In particular, there is a series of dangerous amphetamines with the street name “bath salts”. Unlike legitimate bath salts, these drugs have been known to cause serious psychotic episodes and extremely dangerous behaviour in those who use them.

The Safe Streets and Communities Act toughened penalties for the importation and exportation of dangerous drugs. Can the Minister of Justice please inform this House about the government's latest action to keep our streets and communities safe?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in that the recently passed Safe Streets and Communities Act will crack down on those who would import these dangerous drugs into Canada. This legislation ensured that 21 different amphetamines, including two of the substances with the name of bath salts, will be moved into schedule I of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. This means tougher sentences for those who import and traffic these dangerous drugs.

I would like to thank the Minister of Health for moving quickly to ensure that the drug MDPV is also listed in schedule I, thus giving more tools to law enforcement agencies.

Unfortunately the NDP and the Liberals voted against all our efforts to crack down on these dangerous drugs. Shame on them.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL FILM BOARD

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the arts community is currently crying for help to save the NFB's CineRobotheque. Indeed, the complex will have to close its doors because of the Conservatives' cuts, but it is central to the cultural life of Montreal, Quebec and Canada and has been for some 20-odd years. The CineRobotheque is well used by members of the public and artists alike. No fewer than 30,000 people visited it last year.

Philippe Falardeau, an Oscar nominee who has been praised many times by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, is a good example of the NFB's relevance: he got his start there.

Once again, the minister needs to think about the consequences. If the centre closes, we will be left with nothing, but we will see.

I invite him to reconsider his decision in order to keep this cultural centre open.

● (1450)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have told the House a number of times already that this government understands the importance of arts and culture in Canada, which is why this government has invested heavily in that sector.

Unfortunately, the NDP and the Liberals voted against all those investments. I hope that, in the future, the NDP will vote for our bills in order to support our artists.

[English]

We will always support our artists. We will always support communities across this country that want to join with us in investing in arts and culture because we understand how important it is to the Canadian economy.

We will continue to do that because we are going to focus like a laser on jobs and the economy. We hope the opposition will join us in doing that.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government had a funny way of showing its support for artists in Canada when it cut both the NFB and Telefilm in the budget, including Mediatheque cinema in Toronto, which has had more than half a million visitors viewing more than 10,000 Canadian-made films, important films, films that tell the stories at the heart of who we are.

People make these films to share with Canadians and then the Conservatives close the cinemas that show the films. What kind of cultural policy is this?

Will the government reverse these absolutely senseless cuts?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has a problem here. Every single time we have moved forward with our economic action plan to invest in arts and culture, those members vote against it. When we support cutting taxes for families, they vote against it. When we support our scientists, our communities, they vote against it. Whether it is on resources, arts and culture or tax cuts for families, they vote against it. Anything that will create wealth in this economy, they vote against it.

We are very proud of the investments we have made in arts and culture, some of the highest levels of funding in Canadian history. The only thing we know for sure is that, no matter what we do, the NDP will vote against it.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in cutting culture and spying on veterans, the Conservatives have a fine record, to be sure.

In terms of violations of veterans' privacy, we thought we had seen it all, but here we have a Department of Veterans Affairs' inquiry into privacy violations that is now under investigation itself for privacy violations.

The allegation has led to an investigation by the Privacy Commissioner.

Can the minister tell us why he is incapable of putting a stop to the continued violations of veterans' privacy?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear. Our government believes that any breach of confidentiality is totally unacceptable. That is why we do not agree with the Jolicoeur report. We do agree with the Privacy Commissioner's report and that is why I have asked the staff in my department to co-operate fully with the commissioner during her investigation.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only privacy issues are at stake at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Surprisingly, Sarah Atwood, a 90-year-old World War II veteran was denied access to Camp Hill. Ted Shiner, a 91-year-old veteran in Bedford, Nova Scotia, was denied VIP services just like 87-year-old Harry Gulkin of Outremont and Art Humphreys, who unfortunately passed away before he was able to get a lift to help him go up and down his stairs.

All these World War II veterans were denied benefits, but surprisingly the government found \$700,000 to give to well-paid executive managers at DVA.

How can the minister possibly justify \$700,000 to well-paid public servants and deny World War II heroes—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have invested billions of dollars so that our veterans have access to all the services and benefits to which they are entitled.

Of course, veterans must meet the criteria to become eligible for those programs. That is what our officials do. They are dedicated people. Thousands of public servants are working every day to assess each veteran's specific needs. I can tell you that they do a remarkable job. We can be proud of the public servants in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Their job is to look after a national treasure, our veterans themselves.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government says it will privatize the Experimental Lakes Area program, if it does not eliminate it altogether. However, the program does large ecosystems-scale research whose findings inform federal public policy. Because of the program, we have an acid rain treaty with the United States and we have taken phosphate out of detergents.

Canada's ecosystems belong to Canadians. Only the Conservatives would think that privatizing research fundamental to the health of our aquatic ecosystems is a good thing.

Why is the government not treating Canada's water as a public trust?

● (1455)

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me assure my colleague that it is.

He is indeed correct. The Experimental Lakes Area program, over the decades, has greatly informed both treaty-making as well as public consumer goods; it played a big part in the acid rain treaty.

At the same time, we want to put the research where the challenges are. Environment Canada is moving its scientists farther west, to examine the acidification of lakes in western Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is throwing out tools that would allow it to develop and implement a national water strategy.

It is sabotaging the Fisheries Act; it is abandoning the Experimental Lakes Area; it is cutting the Institut Maurice-Lamontagne—the only francophone research centre at Fisheries and Oceans Canada; it is eliminating the water resources strategy group at Environment Canada; and it is ending groundwater modelling. The list goes on.

Will the government ever stop pretending that it wants to adopt a national water strategy?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clean and cleaner water is a priority of our government, certainly for Environment Canada. We have invested significantly in our Great Lakes, in Lake Simcoe, in Lake Winnipeg. We continue to maintain the highest standards of water quality monitoring across the country, leaving to the provinces and municipalities water quantity because they are the ones that regulate both metering and pricing.

This government does not pay lip service to the environment, as the previous Liberal government did. We are getting things done.

*Oral Questions***AGRICULTURE**

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday at the agriculture committee, Canada's honey and honeybee producers testified first-hand their gut-wrenching accounts about devastating losses to their industry. Some witnesses reported up to 85% of colony losses. This could lead to a crisis in agriculture production in areas of this country. They also highlighted the lack of support programs for this disaster.

What support is the government providing to these producers to ensure that they will make it through this crisis, and will it take action immediately?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take these types of allegations very seriously. Of course, we rely on sound science to prove these types of situations.

There are reports from the United States and other areas that this type of action has happened. There are studies that are ongoing. Certainly, we will look at those. We will begin our own studies and get to the bottom of this as quickly as we can.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the witnesses we heard at committee believe that the death of their healthy bees this spring is directly linked to corn planting in neighbouring fields. Corn seeds are coated with neonicotinoid insecticide. Recent research shows that seed planter exhaust containing this dangerous chemical is likely responsible. A number of countries have banned the use of neonicotinoid insecticides. Canadian voices calling for a moratorium are growing.

What urgent action is the minister taking now to ensure these chemicals are not destroying a vital and irreplaceable part of the food chain?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the government, we understand the importance of bees in pollinating our crops and we are moving forward on that front. We have spent some \$3 million on research and development projects to make our bee industry healthier here in Canada.

These are new allegations that have just come to light yesterday.

We are a good government. We react as quickly as possible. However, we do not do things overnight, just like that. We rely on sound science to make sure we are moving in the right direction. We spend our money appropriately, with taxpayers' funding. We can never, ever count on the NDP to backstop any of that spending.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the budget bill having the longest amount of debate in the House and the longest amount of committee stage consideration of any budget bill in over two decades, the NDP and its partners want to delay it and the implementation of the economic action plan 2012.

At a time when the global recovery remains fragile, especially in Europe, Canadians want the government to focus on promoting jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

Could the Minister of Finance explain why the implementation of Canada's economic action plan is so important to ensure that Canada's economy remains strong?

• (1500)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the best question of the day so far. It is about the economy and it is about jobs. The economic recovery, particularly in Europe as I know from my discussions today, is fragile. We must protect our own country.

The economic action plan is vitally important for our country. It has been working. We have created over 750,000 net new jobs in Canada. We have the bill before Parliament now to continue with Canada's economic action plan. It is important that we get this bill passed to protect Canada and protect—

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. Paul's.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of the Environment effectively shut the door on including aboriginal groups in the new advisory panel on hunting and angling. That is the same minister who has refused to apologize for listing first nations as “adversaries”.

How can the Conservative government exclude the only Canadians with constitutionally protected hunting and fishing rights from this important consultation?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I reject the entire content of that question. The hunting and fishing advisory panel was created to deepen the dialogue with a group that had not been previously broadly consulted, and that is fishermen and hunters.

As my colleague has rightfully said, first nations have a constitutional right to hunt and fish and they are regularly, if not constantly, consulted with regard to wildlife and conservation issues. They also, in many cases, are members of the panel committee.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Experimental Lakes Area of the Freshwater Institute is a vital program for keeping our ecosystems healthy. It has helped us make outstanding discoveries, especially in terms of the effects of acid rain and pollutants—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: There are still too many conversations in the House. The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry has the floor, and all hon. members should give her their attention.

Oral Questions

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, this program has helped us make outstanding discoveries, especially in terms of the effects of acid rain and pollutants on freshwater ecosystems.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives have decided to end the funding for the program. Its elimination will have major consequences that will jeopardize the health of Canadians, our water and our environment.

Why are they putting Canadians' health at risk?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in my previous answer, the experimental lakes program has proved invaluable over the decades. It did inform the writing of the acid rain treaty. However, our knowledge of the impact of acid rain from the American industrial region is very broad and deep. We are now moving our science farther west where there are acid-sensitive lakes and where research is required.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader has shamefully attacked Canadians who work in Canada's resource sectors by calling the industries that provide their communities with jobs a “disease” to Canada. This irresponsible position is offensive to Canadians everywhere.

Could the Minister of Natural Resources please update the House on the government's position regarding resource industry jobs?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a new study from the Conference Board of Canada and the Business Development Bank of Canada has found that, contrary to the ideological views of the NDP leader, massive investment in the oil and gas and mining sectors is fueling growth in industries ranging from manufacturing to engineering.

Pierre Cl  roux of the BDC said:

It is interesting to note that the economic boom linked to oil and gas and mining activities is benefiting many industries—not only in Western Canada, but throughout the country.

The NDP's divisive view that Canada's resource industries are a disease is irresponsible—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

* * *

• (1505)

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Ms.   laine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us see what excuse the Minister of Transport will use today to wash his hands of the Neuville airport.

Last week, I was in Saskatoon at the FCM conference, where 1,600 mayors unanimously asked the federal government to consult them before building private airports in their municipalities. At the same conference, the minister stated that he was very willing to work with the municipalities. That is a clear commitment.

Will the minister keep his promise and work with the municipality of Neuville on the airport file?

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, that is unbelievable.

The town met with the developers seven times. The developer received a plan with seven possible sites from the town. It was the town that provided the plan. The town signed a memorandum of understanding with the developers. If that is not being consulted, I wonder what is. There were seven meetings, and the developer decided to use a parcel of land proposed by the town. That is no longer consultation, that is an agreement. Just because the mayor wants to rip up a memorandum of understanding, that does not mean that it is not valid.

We will continue to do what must be done. In future, we will analyze the scenario and all possible options, but this matter is closed.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina already raised today in question period the decisive vote of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities urging the government to remove non-budgetary environmental items from Bill C-38.

My question is for the Minister of Fisheries, since he has repeatedly referenced FCM as a supporter of the bill and in fact said, “countless other municipal leaders have been calling for these types of reforms for many years”. Now that we can count them on the fingers of one hand, will the government admit it made a mistake in going after and gutting the Fisheries Act in Bill C-38?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said many times that we are focusing our fish and fish habitat protection on Canada's fisheries. In fact, it is true that municipalities across the country have indicated to me on many occasions that the red tape they have to go through for work in and around minor waterways is excessive.

I have a quote from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities that says, “By reducing the time municipal employees are forced to spend filling out forms...the changes will make it faster and less expensive for local governments to perform routine public services”.

*Privilege***POINTS OF ORDER**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my point of order arises out of an event that occurred today at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

During the meeting, while witnesses were providing testimony in response to one of the members of the committee, a member of the media, Kady O'Malley of the CBC approached the member for Avalon at the committee table and requested to see an in camera report, and it was provided by the member for Avalon. I recognize that the breach by the member is an issue to be dealt with by the committee itself, but the conduct of the member of the media, in my view, very clearly breaches the procedures of the committee.

Could you please review that, Mr. Speaker, and report back to the House on the proper etiquette by members of the media and their conduct at committee?

The Speaker: I appreciate the point raised by the hon. parliamentary secretary. When events transpire at committee, it is up to the committee to deal with anything that may have breached protocol or the rules at the committee. I appreciate him raising it in the House and if there is a report presented to the House, it will be something that the Speaker can then weigh in on.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I want to bring to your attention a situation that I believe may be a breach of my privilege in that it is hindering me in my capacity to do my work as a member of Parliament.

About a month ago, I called the office of a president of a crown corporation to obtain some information. I had dealt with that office in previous years and had obtained information. This time, I was told that I had to put the request through to the office of the minister responsible for that corporation.

A couple of days later, I asked that minister in the House for a briefing. I was told that the minister would see to it and that I would hear later. This was before the May constituency week. After the May constituency week, I had not heard, so I asked the minister again in the House. I still have not heard and I need this information to do my work. I had hoped to have it by the weekend, because I am attending a convention for which the information is required.

I am asking not for privileged information, secret information, cabinet documents or anything like that. Nor am I asking for government strategy. I am asking for facts and an ability to meet with officials to ask them questions about these facts.

I am advised that another member of the House had asked and was offered such a briefing. That member happens to be on the

government side, and I wonder if the fact that I am on the opposition side has anything to do with it.

I am aware that if a briefing were to be offered to me, my question of privilege would be moot. However, it has not been and I have not heard. Therefore, I am bringing this to your attention, Mr. Speaker. You will notice I have not mentioned specifics because my intent is not to aggravate, antagonize, attack or criticize. It is strictly to obtain information to allow me to do my work as the Liberal advocate for co-operatives.

If you would like to look at this, Mr. Speaker, I would gladly provide you with more detailed information in order to assist you in your determination. Should you determine that there is, indeed, a breach of parliamentary privilege or a prima facie breach of parliamentary privilege, I would be happy to move the appropriate motion.

● (1510)

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member raising this. I will ask him for a little more information and then come back to the House in due course.

* * *

SYRIA

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion on Syria. I move, seconded by the Minister of International Cooperation and the member for Mount Royal:

That the House continue to support measures which

- (a) condemn the brutal massacre of Syrian civilians by government forces in clear violation of earlier commitments;
- (b) call for an immediate end to the violence, especially the attacks on civilians;
- (c) support the Joint Special Envoy of the UN and Arab League efforts to establish a ceasefire and implement the six-point peace plan;
- (d) call for unrestricted access to the country for the international media;
- (e) support the government's decision to expel Syrian diplomats in protest to the latest atrocities in Syria;
- (f) call on the international community to speak with one voice clearly and categorically condemning the violence and working to bring about a complete cessation of hostilities;
- (g) urge the leadership of China and Russia to play an active and decisive role in achieving an effective ceasefire that saves the lives of innocent civilians as well as negotiating a road map to reforms that respond to the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people;
- (h) continue Canada's humanitarian aid to refugees and to internally displaced persons fleeing violence in Syria, as needed, and;
- (i) stand in solidarity with those who aspire for peace, democratic governance and the protection of human rights.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Burnaby—Douglas, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Wednesday, June 6th, 2012, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1515)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EXPERTISE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise today in support of this motion, which focuses attention not only on the massive cuts to research, data and evidence that can be found in the budget bill currently before the House, but also to speak to the government's contempt for information, research and advocacy since the beginning of its mandate.

Research is a core driver of economic competitiveness, environmental protection, and health and safety. Objective, publicly funded research and statistical data is necessary for our public service to be able to serve all Canadians, especially since service provision is the majority of the work of the federal government. The government has made it its mandate to obscure objective facts in favour of controlling and privatizing information to create narratives that suit its priorities.

It is crucial that research be credible. In order for it to maintain this integrity we must be sure that private funding of our research respects the autonomy and independence of our researchers in their objectives and in their methodologies. Yet this last budget has proposed refocusing the National Research Council to be “business-led”, and is increasingly concentrating on targeting post-secondary research to meet “business needs”. I know that research often relies on private funding, as much as private interests rely on the research provided to them.

Business of Supply

I know that much innovation comes from these partnerships, but this is not what the government is proposing. What it has done is increase the control that it and private interest have on what research is being done and how it is being done. That is a frightening move for the credibility of Canada's research.

By increasingly removing critical financial supports and increasingly correlating research to demand-driven funding models in order to service profit-driven demands, we are systematically inhibiting our research integrity and competitiveness.

We have seen many instances of the government obstructing research before. One of the first things the government did in 2006 was slash \$5 million from the Status of Women agency and make a series of changes to its purpose. The independent research fund was abolished, and the mandate of the women's program was changed to explicitly exclude any project having to do with research and advocacy. While the funds themselves have since been recommitted to the agency, the independent research fund has not reappeared and the mandate of the agency continues to forbid research and advocacy. The purpose of this is clear. The government is ignoring the deeper, systemic injustices that women repeatedly encounter because the injustices do not fit the government's world view. Effective, long-term planning and investment in social programs, while proven to be in the best interests of women and the economy at large, are something the government fears.

As a member of the status of women committee, I hear every week from expert witnesses who are still suffering from the long-term effects of this strategic shift.

Carmela Hutchison is president of the DisAbled Women's Network Canada, which is the only organization that represents disabled women, the largest minority group in Canada. She wrote to me to say:

We could write volumes about the health and safety consequences to millions of women and girls with disabilities in Canada which are due to the lack of publicly funded research and statistical information already! How can this Government propose any further cuts to research and data collection when this information is essential to informing your honourable Members and all Canadians about the health, safety and the economic well being of millions of women with disabilities in this country, who continue to be the poorest citizens of this country!

When we look at Bill C-38 and its anti-information cuts, which are overwhelming in their scope, we see that what happened to women in Canada will happen in almost every community and sector, from first nations to academia. It is most acute in the field of environmental science. The fact of climate change is something that the government needs to suppress as quickly as possible in order to serve the corporate interests of its friends.

However, the ethically repugnant muzzling of scientists is certainly not all we are facing. The cuts to Library and Archives Canada, Statistics Canada, the National Council of Welfare, the First Nations Statistical Institute, and even the CBC are moves against the cultural identity of Canada.

Business of Supply

Our heritage and history are deeply affected by these cuts. There is a relationship between dismantling Library and Archives Canada, discrediting Statistics Canada and disabling the CBC, which becomes clear when one considers that the government is aggressively pursuing a mandate to create a Canadian narrative that suits its interest rather than reality.

• (1520)

If it targets Library and Archives, we will have fewer resources available that describe what Canada once was. If it utterly destroys our ability to produce credible statistical data, we will not know who we are now. When it entirely abolishes the National Council of Welfare and the First Nations Statistical Institute, it is preventing social scientists from understanding trends and finding solutions. Couple this with the witch hunt we are witnessing against the CBC and the subsequent slashes to its budget and we see a weakening of the only mainstream Canadian broadcaster that is mandated with communicating our diverse heritage and cultures.

I was alarmed when the Minister of State for Science and Technology announced this past March that he was planning on refocusing the National Research Council and in May announced that he was changing the direction of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in order to strengthen its ties with the private sector. SSHRC, like the NRC, is a public research-funding body that is mandated with funding innovative research that benefits all Canadians, not just the business sector. Yet, in his own words, the Minister of State for Science and Technology said that this is a great opportunity to focus the NRC more toward the business end to be “a one-stop, 1-800, 'I have a solution for your business problem'.”

Coming from an academic background, I know that privately commissioned research where the objectives are determined by private interests and not the researchers themselves is simply not credible. As an MP, I have witnessed the fact that our public service providers require our research councils to conduct research on behalf of all demographics and communities, not just businesses. As a citizen, I do not agree that my taxes be spent to subsidize the needs of businesses before the needs of families.

In conclusion, without credible research all Canadians will see a decline in the quality of their service provisions the way women have over the past eight years. Innovation will be stalled by the control of private interests over what it is we study.

I seriously urge this House to consider the long-term effects of these cuts and I urge us to ask ourselves this. Who does the suppression and rewriting of information benefit? When did the needs of big business supplant the needs of citizens? Where will Canada be in 5, 10, 20 years without credible statistical data upon which we can base future planning?

If there is one thing the now abolished National Council of Welfare has taught us through its research, it is that short-term investments in human capital and communities reap long-term economic gains. It is frivolous, short-sighted and fiscally irresponsible for the government to be dismantling these institutions.

I hope that this debate enlightens the members opposite as to the dangers they are precipitating in the budget bill. I hope that they will support the opposition motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her very thoughtful and well-considered speech.

During our budget consultations, I met with residents of Vancouver and spoke to them about the budget, this Trojan Horse, since the Conservatives do not want to consult Canadians. One scientist told me that he did not want to reveal his views on the environment for fear that this government would arrange for him to lose his job.

Could the hon. member respond to that comment? What does this tell us about the academic community in general when a scientist is so afraid of talking about his information and his research? What message is being sent to the scientific community?

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville for this excellent question.

In fact, the government is sending a message to Canada's scientists that it does not want their research to be credible. It wants them to reflect what it wants to show and what it is doing. It wants to be able to say that it is investing a great deal of effort in the environment, even though that is not true.

In order to do so, the government consistently prevents scientists who are conducting innovative research from showing their results. It is trying to control the research being done in all academic fields, but especially the environment.

It is clear that the government is not concerned about the Canadian environment and it does not want to show that a problem currently exists.

• (1525)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the last while we have been raising the issues of scientists and scientific research to Statistics Canada. We think these issues are fundamental in terms of being able to make sound decisions. We need to have the background information necessary in order to make policy decisions.

Could my colleague tell the House how important it is for us to have statistical information that is well researched prior to making good policy decisions that will have an impact on things such as our environment and social programming? Without having the research necessary in order to provide evidence that certain things work and certain things do not, is the government putting itself into a bad position going forward in terms of public policy?

Business of Supply

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, if we do not have valid and specific data, we cannot make correlations with what is going on in society. We cannot correlate, for instance, a woman being in poverty and her experience of violence when we do not have that kind of data. The national household survey, which was implemented by the Conservatives, is not valid because does not give us valid information because we are not getting an adequate sample of what Canadians are experiencing and the situation of Canadians.

As a result, we do not know where we need to be targeting policies. We do not know the effect of certain policies. We do not know how to solve problems and move forward as a country.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise again in the House to talk about some of the initiatives that our government is taking with respect to arts and culture and, more specifically, to Library and Archives Canada.

As I said in question period, our government understands the importance of arts and culture to the Canadian economy. That is why, as part of our economic action plan, we made a conscious effort and decided that, while other governments around the world were cutting funds to arts and culture, it was important to the Canadian economy that we continue to invest in arts and culture. We understand how many jobs that represents and how much economic activity it generates. It generates literally hundreds of thousands of jobs and some \$80 billion worth of economic activity.

Our economic action plan not only increased the budget for arts and culture but we worked with our provincial and municipal partners across the country to make significant investments in the sector. In my own riding, I just had the good fortune on Saturday to work with my mayor, the town council of Stouffville and the provincial MPP to cut the ribbon on the expansion of the Stouffville Museum. It was a wonderful day. The entire community came out to celebrate the expansion. It followed on an earlier ribbon cutting of the expansion of the Markham Museum, another initiative that came through Canada's economic action plan.

We have announced investments in the Markham Theatre. Investments were made in the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts. On every matter that counts, be it supporting artists or the Canada Council for Arts, we have continued to support that community because we have always understood how important it is to Canadians that their government support their artists and do everything in its power to preserve, protect and enhance its heritage. Our government will continue to do that into the future.

Library and Archives Canada has been mentioned in the motion. A lot is happening at Library and Archives Canada. It is moving forward with its modernization initiative that will improve and expand access to Canada's documentary and cultural heritage for all Canadians, regardless of their interests, profession or location. In fact, just last week, Library and Archives Canada announced the launch of its portrait portal, which showcases the largest collection of portraits in the country, including works acquired since the 1880s. This collection, made up of paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, caricatures, medals and other works, represents historical figures who played an important role in Canada's development as a nation. This digitization initiative makes available to Canadians across the

country many thousands of works by renown Canadian artists, ranging from portraits by Yousuf Karsh to those of William Topley. Hockey fans across Canada can even find rare hockey cards from around 1910.

The portrait portal gives Canadians the ability to access their national portrait collection at the time and place they want, wherever they are. For millions of people across the country, this will be an exciting first step in the discovery of the wealth and diversity of Canada's documentary heritage.

Library and Archives Canada is committed to posting over 2,000 digitized portraits every month for the coming years. This project illustrates its commitment to adapting to the new digital environment by making the national portrait collection more accessible to all Canadians from coast to coast. This is important because in communities across the country people want to have access to the collections, which we sometimes take for granted as members of Parliament, that we have right here at our doorstep.

It is not just Library and Archives Canada, of course. I know my community museums are doing a heck of a lot of work in order to digitize their own collections. We are very proud of that. Across the country, small and local museums have very impressive collections. We will continue to work with them to ensure those collections are preserved and protected.

Additionally, the government has sought to move forward with commemorations for the War of 1812. It is, of course, the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, which, as we have said, was an incredibly important war in what was the foundation and creation of Canada.

● (1530)

The War of 1812 helped preserve the French facr here, and it led to a unified Canada. We are very proud of Canada's participation in that with our allies, the British and our first nations people. I know that people in communities across Ontario to Quebec to New Brunswick will be celebrating their local contributions to the War of 1812. Library and Archives Canada is also doing a part. Members will be interested to know that it will provide access to over 73,000 new images of the War of 1812. That is an incredible opportunity for Canadians to learn more about the War of 1812, a war that was so fundamentally important to the foundation of this country.

Last year, Library and Archives Canada also launched the Canadian feature film index. This index was created in 1972 and is now available as an online database that provides information on over 4,300 Canadian feature films produced from 1913 to 2009. This database is an important resource for filmmakers, students and researchers, as well as those who are interested in Canada's cinematic history. It ensures that this key part of Canada's documentary and cultural heritage is accessible to everyone.

We can trace Library and Archives Canada's commitment for enhanced accessibility to 2010 when it decided to expand the Lest We Forget workshop program to include students from across Canada. Military service files were selected from the vaults where they were stored. They were digitized and made available online, along with a step-by-step teachers' guide to organizing a workshop.

Business of Supply

In the first year of this online program, Library and Archives Canada began with 200 military service files and the participation of our public library systems. This year, in the second year of digital outreach, students will be able to access more than 5,000 military service files of Canadian soldiers, doctors, nurses and chaplains who served during the First World War or who were killed in action during the Second World War. The number of participating public library systems doubled so that now LAC's Lest We Forget workshops are offered from coast to coast. In the first six months, approximately 20,000 downloads of military service records were conducted by the Lest We Forget section of the Collections Canada website.

Our latest example is Library and Archives Canada's development of the new digital projects to help Canadians access their documentary heritage online. Library and Archives Canada recently launched discover blog. It contains information on military and genealogical records where Canadians can discover their family connections. These new initiatives showcase what great work Library and Archives Canada has done to enable Canadians to become more knowledgeable and to experience our historical and documentary heritage.

Again, this is good for Canadians. They will be able to access historical content regardless of their interest, profession or location. The modernization initiative means LAC is becoming an institution that promotes democratic access to Canada's documentary heritage for all. It means changing LAC's points of access to reflect the tremendous opportunities that advanced information and communications technology provide.

Library and Archives Canada has made some strategic choices to ensure that funds invested will yield tangible, sustainable results for Canadians.

It is clear that Library and Archives Canada's long-term plan to modernize and virtualize services in order to reach the greatest number of Canadians more easily and to provide Canadians with better service is actually working. More services in historical content are available to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Library and Archives Canada's long-term plan includes the introduction of video conferencing tools, like Skype, to extend front-line services to clients across Canada. Clients will be able to book an appointment on site or by using Skype or the telephone. This allows the right experts to be at the appointment and it allows the experts to prepare, therefore providing better services.

● (1535)

Additionally, Library and Archives Canada is using social media. The use of social media has been working to achieve a comprehensive presence on the web in five key areas.

First, in 2008 Library and Archives Canada launched its Flickr account to provide systematic images around the institution and from the collections. To date it has approximately 400,000 views.

Second, Library and Archives Canada has a Twitter account. It was launched at the end of February and is gaining new followers every day. It provides information to stakeholders and citizens, allows the organization to reach new audiences and facilitates access to Library and Archives Canada's services and collections.

Last week Library and Archives Canada also launched its streamlined YouTube channel in order to raise awareness about its holdings and activities. Also last week, Library and Archives Canada launched its official Facebook account. In addition to institutional messaging and news about events and new products, Library and Archives will initiate original features to engage with Canadians, such as "Today in History" and "What Have We Here?"

The fifth element of Library and Archives Canada's expanding web presence is the release of podcasts that highlight significant collection items and share expertise and knowledge. Each podcast episode will feature different content and will maintain a common focus on engagement with the collection and accessibility.

Podcasts have recently been launched on Project Naming, which enables Nunavut youth to connect with elders and to better understand their past. It also helps bridge the cultural differences and geographical distances between Nunavut and more southern parts of Canada.

Upcoming podcasts will feature the War of 1812 and the "Double Take: Portraits of Intriguing Canadians" travelling exhibit. This new way of promoting our heritage will facilitate discovery, access and engagement among Canadians, Canadian users and their collections.

In addition to the modernization initiative, Library and Archives Canada has also created a broad pan-Canadian network for the preservation of the country's documentary heritage. This emerging network now involves a wide range of stakeholders from the library and archival fields from across Canada. In so doing, Library and Archives Canada continues to serve communities across the country, but in a more efficient and effective manner, using partnerships with the documentary heritage network.

As I mentioned earlier, we on this side of the House have consistently understood the importance of arts and culture. Unfortunately, we have been placed in a position such that each time we make an investment in this sector, the opposition has voted against it.

As part of our economic action plan, we said quite clearly that we wanted to invest not only in arts and culture but also in a wide range of activities that are important to the Canadian economy. Of course, that included investing in roads and bridges. It included working with our provincial partners to make sure we could invest in colleges and university campuses across this country. Unfortunately, what happened? Again, the opposition voted against that.

What did it mean for my community? What did the opposition actually vote against in my community? It voted against the Stouffville museum. It voted against the expansion of the Markham museum. It voted against an emergency operations centre for the town of Markham, this following what was a terrible summer tornado in Vaughan, where the need for an emergency response system became clear and evident. It voted against improvements to our sports facilities.

Business of Supply

For the town of Markham in the riding for the hon. member for Markham—Unionville, it meant voting against a skating rink, the largest outdoor skating rink in the GTA. It meant voting against tennis domes for the community that the hon. member for Markham—Unionville and I share.

One of the things that has been so important about the economic action plan is that it invested in communities across this country. It invested in all of these communities. Back in 2008 and 2009, we sat down with our provincial and municipal partners and asked, “What do we need in order to get the economy moving?” They told us we needed to invest in infrastructure, so that is what we did.

How did the opposition respond? It voted against.

Every single time the opposition members get up in this House, they consistently talk about an initiative they would have liked to see the government do as part of our economic action plan. They talk about infrastructure; we have already talked about how they voted against that. They talk about a national housing strategy. This government invested in housing for our seniors and for those who are less advantaged as part of the economic action plan. How did they vote? They voted against it.

● (1540)

When we talked about seniors and expanding opportunities for our seniors, the first thing we did was allow for income splitting for seniors. How did they vote? They voted against it.

They talked about increasing the supports for our vulnerable seniors. What did we do? We increased funding for GIS—

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

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Madam Speaker, I fail to see how the voting record of the official opposition pertains to the debate at hand today in the House. I would hope that the member across would get to the point and return to the subject of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: If the hon. member would like to comment and perhaps return to the motion at hand, which is rather general, I will leave it to the member to return to the subject.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I know that the truth is starting to hurt the opposition. You will agree with me that this motion before the House today is a pretty broad motion that brings in a whole realm of activities of the Government of Canada. It is rather an omnibus motion that gives us the opportunity on this side of the House to talk about all of the great things this government is doing and has been doing since it was elected in 2006 to help further the economy of this country.

We cannot talk about Library and Archives Canada without talking about growing the economy. That is the real problem we have with the opposition members. They do not understand that the resources that go into paying for these programs and services that Canadians value so much come from a growing economy. When there are more jobs in the economy, we have more resources to invest in health care, in education, in our heritage and in things like Library and Archives Canada, but they do not understand that.

It is a year since Canadians gave us a strong mandate to focus on jobs and the economy, to bring our budget back into balance and to

ensure that we continue with economic growth so that we can continue the investments that Canadians have told us are their priorities. They have said to us that their priorities are for the government to focus on jobs and the economy, but they also want us to continue to focus on health care. That is why we have increased funding for health care to the highest level in Canadian history. How do the opposition members vote? They vote against it. They have voted against everything that this government does to improve the economy of this country and to help those who create jobs in this economy.

Here we are, a year later, still talking about issues in question period. The opposition members have nothing to talk about at all, so they are dragging up questions from the first days after the last election. They are talking about issues that are not the priorities of Canadians.

Then when we point out the fact that we have actually accomplished all of the things that Canadians have sent us here to do by focusing on jobs, by creating 750,000 net new jobs, by watching how we do our resource sector, by balanced economic growth and environmental protection, they get nervous and realize they are making a mistake, but they still vote against it.

They have an opportunity here with the budget bill that we are bringing forward, the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, to actually do the right thing. They have the opportunity to do the right thing for Canadian families. They have the opportunity to do the right thing for small businesses. They have the opportunity to do the right thing for those industries that help create wealth, jobs and opportunity in this country. They can vote in favour of Canada's economic action plan. They can stop the delaying tactics that they are using on all of the committees and specifically on the next phase of Canada's economic action plan and start focusing on the priorities of Canadians: jobs, the economy, health care and those programs that Canadians have come to depend on as foundational to this government.

We will continue to do this on this side of the House because we know it is what is important to Canadians. I only hope that side of the House will actually, just for once, take off their partisan hats and put the interests of Canadians first.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my Conservative colleague the following question.

He talks about his initiative. I would like to congratulate him because putting all government data online is a good initiative. However, if there are no data because of all the cuts that the government is making in research and at Statistics Canada, what data are they going to be putting online?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, on the War of 1812 alone, Library and Archives Canada is putting out some 73,000 images for Canadians to use. The portrait gallery is putting a number of portraits online.

Business of Supply

We are trying to work with our provincial and municipal partners across this country to make sure we digitize the collections available here in Ottawa and make them available to people across the country.

The hon. member talks about the census. We heard the ironic spectre yesterday of the Liberals wanting us to jail people who are not filling out the census, after we have said it is not something we would do. We are seeing incredible information coming back from the census that could be used by communities across this country to provide programs and services.

There will be lots available to Canadians through the digitization projects, not only through Library and Archives Canada but also through the National Film Board. I encourage the hon. member to take a look, because there are some really great things happening in both of them.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as my uncle used to say, “Hang on there, skipper; there is more to this than meets the eye.”

I would suggest the member look at the program, the NADP, which has provided small and medium-sized grants to these local communities.

I get the feeling that the government is only looking at the act of taking a picture and putting it onto a CD. There is more to it. There is a storytelling element to this that archivists can provide. These small grants that were provided under this cancelled program really provide the expertise for the smallest of communities—church groups, ethnic groups and aboriginal communities—to tell a story.

I would like the hon. member to comment. Does he not agree that this is not just about putting a picture on a CD, but about telling a story? It is the narrative that needs to be done, and that takes a small investment from a program that the Conservatives have just cancelled.

• (1550)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, it is about telling stories and it is about unleashing the potential that we have, not only in our national museum but in those across the country, to tell that story. That is why the government, through the economic action plan, has made significant investments in arts and culture across this country.

I referenced my own two museums. I referenced the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum, which received a \$2 million boost through Canada's economic action plan. That offsets some of the other initiatives that the town could not do, which is leading to more participation at the local museum. The same goes for the Markham Museum. It has an incredible collection that the staff wants to digitize to make available to their community. They are starting to do that because this government has invested in health care.

We have uploaded a lot of those costs through Canada's economic action plan, which the opposition members voted against, whether the costs were for infrastructure for roads or bridges or all those cultural and sporting institutions. They consistently voted against all of that.

We are trying to work with our partners to alleviate those high costs that they cannot afford so that they can put more money into arts and culture. We are actually getting the job done.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, just to bring it back to the larger issue of science, I am just wondering if my hon. colleague could let me know what he thinks about who should be asking the fundamental research questions. Is it scientists or is it big industry?

His government is moving the research agenda toward making scientists answer the questions of big industry, whereas the scientists are saying that they are the ones best suited to ask these questions.

I am wondering where the hon. member stands on this debate.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, let us be fair. We do not consider those people who create jobs and investments and wealth in this country to be a disease that we need to run away from. On this side of the House, we believe that the people who create jobs and investments—small, medium and indeed large businesses—are actually important to the growth of the Canadian economy.

We have supported scientific research across this country through Canada's economic action plan. The member was not here for parts of the economic action plan, but if he were to look at the economic action plan, he would see significant reinvestments in our colleges and universities in research chairs across this country.

The one thing we could always depend on is that the NDP would vote against that, and so would the Liberals. When it comes to scientific research and expanding the economy, we get the job done; they do everything they can to stand in the way of that growth.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I was listening to my hon. colleague's speech, it seemed to me that he really wanted to avoid talking about science and the use of a scientific approach to good governance.

The reason for my hon. colleague's emphasis on the economy and it all being about growing the economy is that those members do not want to face honest accounting of what is going on in the country. Just as an example that I would bring up to him, the Soviet Union had a lot of economic growth for many decades, but the economy and the society was rotten at the core and they were not willing to be honest with themselves as to what was going on in their country. That is the sort of thing that can go wrong.

Why does my hon. colleague not want our government to be honest with itself and the Canadian people?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, what an absolutely disgusting question from that member.

The member's party on that side actually clapped when he compared this government to the Soviet Union, which massacred hundreds of thousands of people and was responsible for all kinds of atrocious crimes across the world. What an absolutely disgusting thing for that member to say. It really showcases the difference between that side of the House and this side of the House. Those members will do anything, say anything, to try to convince Canadians that they actually care about anything, but they do not.

We are going to focus on jobs and the economy, and we are going to do that so we can pay for health care, so we can pay for the things in my department, such as Canadian Heritage, Library and Archives Canada and our national museums, all things they consistently vote against.

Business of Supply

What a disgusting way to try to win points in a debate.

• (1555)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will tell the House what is disgusting.

[*Translation*]

I find it completely ridiculous, and even hypocritical, that a Conservative member should rise and list the things against which the NDP has voted, while we are debating a bill of more than 400 pages under a time allocation motion. That is what is hypocritical, disgusting and ridiculous.

Many cuts have been announced. I would like to name just a few of them: the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy; the Major Resources Support Grant, the Discovery Grants and the Research Tools and Instruments Grants have been eliminated at the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council; and the First Nations Statistical Institute has been abolished.

One would think that this government has no confidence in science. Could the member tell us why not?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, that itself highlights the difference between the opposition and the government.

It is quite clear to us that the opposition does not understand the budget implementation act. We understand that. Those members probably have not read it. They do not care to talk about all of the important initiatives that are within Canada's economic action plan that will unleash job creation and potential in this economy. They do not get it. They do not understand that. I get that.

We are going to continue to focus on all those things Canadians want us to focus on, because it is the right thing to do. What the opposition does not understand is that by growing the economy, by putting in place initiatives that will help people create jobs, there is more revenue for the government to invest in health care, in culture, in heritage, in education, including some of the things we did through our economic action plan, which included improvements to our colleges and universities, which included research chairs to a number of our institutions.

How do they vote? They vote against it. Then they get upset when we talk about the fact that they voted against every single initiative this government has brought forward to improve the economy. Whether it is housing, they vote against it, or whether it is research, they vote against it. No matter what it is, opposition members vote against it. They stand for nothing, and now they are getting caught up in a web of lies they have tried to sow with Canadians. On this side of the House we will stand up for those Canadian taxpayers and jobs, because it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: You are disgusting.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do have thick skin in most circumstances, but I just want to note the

fact that the people in my riding sent me here with the largest plurality in the entire country. I am not sure it is parliamentary to call the representative of the largest riding in Canada “disgusting” and the opinions of the people I represent “disgusting”.

I wonder, Madam Speaker, if you might ask the hon. member to take a moment to maybe apologize, not only to me but to the 250,000 people I represent who did not send members of Parliament here to call each other disgusting and other names like that.

If this is the new civility in the NDP, I would hate to see what happens when civility breaks down on that side of the House.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, absolutely, if the member from that side of the House wants to apologize to Canadians for misleading them and saying that the NDP voted against this and voted against that and we do not know what we are voting against, I will consider apologizing to him.

• (1600)

Mr. Ted Hsu: Madam Speaker, it seems as if this getting a bit out of hand. However, if people would like to apologize for calling each other disgusting, I think maybe the first person who used that word in the last few minutes should start with an apology.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we continue along that path, I would like to remind all members to be judicious in their choice of language. The word “disgusting” has been bandied around. I think it is not a polite term. I am not sure it is unparliamentary, but it is certainly not a polite term. I would not like to see it used about a person, particularly.

At this point, I would like to ask all members to be judicious in their use of language in this House. This is the Parliament of Canada. I think all Canadians expect us to be respectful. Certainly, there is not necessarily agreement, but there must be respectful language in our debates.

Does the hon. parliamentary secretary want to pursue this point?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I think the member for Kingston and the Islands raised a point. What I did call disgusting was his question. Any time a member equates a particular party, a duly elected government, with a regime that was responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths and untold atrocities, I do think that is a disgusting question.

However, I still have not heard an apology from the member of the NDP for calling the representative of the largest riding in Canada disgusting. I do not think that is parliamentary, Madam Speaker, and his explanation does not suffice.

I hope you will review some of that and, if some of that was picked up in the transcript, you will demand that the member apologize, not only to me but to this House, for such a lack of decorum and for the continued slide of the NDP towards gutter politics.

Business of Supply

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, I was not calling him disgusting. I was calling what he was saying disgusting. Lying to the Canadian public is disgusting, and it should be held as that.

The Deputy Speaker: I think that I will review the record and, if appropriate, I will come back to the House with a ruling.

For now, I think perhaps he has clarified his intent. I did not hear whatever was said, but his intent was not to personalize the debate. [Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, we will try to stop using bad words, even though we are being told that we are getting caught up in a web of our own lies. That is quite something to say as well. I have to wonder if the word “lies” is unparliamentary language. Regardless, I will share my time with my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Once again, we are gathered here to talk about the blind cuts being made by this government. Unfortunately, some competent people who actually know about these subjects are currently leaving the room, which is too bad because I would have re-read today's motion to them:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian scientific and social science expertise is of great value and, therefore, the House calls on the Government to end its muzzling of scientists; to reverse the cuts to research programs at Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Library and Archives Canada, National Research Council Canada, Statistics Canada, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada; and to cancel the closures of the National Council of Welfare and the First Nations Statistical Institute.

The purpose of today's debate is to protect those people in the public service who aim to fuel the debate with objective facts and observations. It is something scientific. Several people said earlier that some people on the other side were having difficulty accepting scientific facts. I would not say that it is because a portion of them are creationists, but there are some people across the way who think that the world is flat or who thought that for some time, anyway.

Today, we wonder if some are denying certain facts deliberately. Why? Is it because of their religious views or because they have strong ties to large companies that, of course, would themselves prefer to choose environmental data analyses with results that suit them better? What is their motivation?

I do not know, but there is a reason why this is the theme of our opposition day: science generally does seem to be losing more and more ground. My colleague who is a member of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage was just called to order on that very issue. I do not believe that this is a topic that he tries to avoid at all costs, but he certainly has his hands full.

This man constantly has to defend the positions of the Conservatives on heritage, archives, libraries and culture, so many issues that they obviously do not care about, with the exception of an editorial line of narrow thinking and a precise reading of history, which they try to shove down our throats with a vengeance. With the exception of those two specific themes, they do not care about those issues.

However, when one is the representative in the House of the people at the Department of Canadian Heritage who are responsible for those areas, when one is responsible for constantly defending those issues on behalf of a team that does not care, one is constantly

busy. The Minister of Canadian Heritage said himself on TV that his team was constantly backstabbing him because he stood up for the CBC and other noble cultural issues associated with fine arts and Latin literature, in their view.

I even heard him say just now that he was very proud of cutting the ribbon at an institution. I would rather hear him talk fondly about organizations he has a connection with than talk about the cuts that the Conservatives are currently making.

However, what I am really interested in, for example, is the doublespeak on Library and Archives Canada. Earlier I heard the hon. member opposite praise the merits of digitization. Of course, that probably has to do with a date in history that adds up to 21 exactly—yes, I am talking about 1812. I have no doubt that he is really interested in that because he likes numbers a lot.

• (1605)

All that aside, they talk about public servants who are digitizing information so that it can be shared. However, the current bill will mean that 50% of the archivists will be laid off, something that seems to me in fact to be completely illogical.

There will always be a need for archivists. Right now, the Conservatives are saying quite enthusiastically that it is marvellous to have access to information. They are patting themselves on the back and saying it is extraordinary that today culture is available on the Web, but on the other hand, they are making cuts. It seems they are taking credit for properly managing the troops, they are congratulating the archivists for their good work, but then they are telling them to get lost. That is what they are saying.

I myself went to meet with the archivists, when they were in town 10 days ago. They were completely shattered. Honestly, no one is more passionate about knowledge than the people at Library and Archives Canada. These people are only interested in the truth, in history and in facts.

No one is in a better position than they are to assess the thoughtlessness with which these cuts are being made, under a gun. Because cuts had to be made, the Conservatives just found a place where cuts could be made and they cut. What happened at that point? The cuts were not made in any visible areas, but rather in an obscure area. What happens when they do not know what it is they are cutting?

Is it not true that the most important thing in a home, or in a society is its foundation, its culture, its history? It is crucial. As we speak, we may well be in a period of restraint. We will have to find out whether things are going well in Canada, or not. We no longer know for sure, because it changes from day to day, according to our colleagues opposite.

The NDP believes that work must be done in broad daylight and that the best antiseptic is sunlight, that the best way of knowing we are doing the right thing is to do it in the open. This is something that I criticize constantly. Watching the Conservatives, we see that they work in the shadows. They decided to make cuts in places where it would not be too obvious.

Business of Supply

It is clear that if 100 archivists showed up in a park in Ottawa, it would be a rather low-key affair. In their heart of hearts, they would rather not breathe fire, wave placards or set fire to mailboxes. They are intellectuals, they are pragmatists, and they are rational people. Of course, they will be against these cuts. There is no better target for cuts than people like them, people who usually work behind the scenes. If the government decided to cut back on snow removal because of a shortage of money, that would really be obvious, but cuts to archiving will go through like a letter in the mail—assuming there is no lockout.

I would also like to mention another very sad program. Actually, the program is not sad at all; on the contrary, it is a wonderful program, but it too was arbitrarily cut. It is called the national archival development program. What is deplorable about it is that we constantly hear from the people opposite about the value of a penny here and a penny there, but we all know the value of a dollar.

It is all a question of choice and of management. You have to know how to manage wealth creation and sharing. This is a very strange example. The national archival development program is being cut, though its main feature was getting communities involved. With each dollar invested by the federal government, people managed to interest private partners in the community so that they could organize local exhibitions and enhance local archives, but the choice was made to cut it. Once again, it was an arbitrary cut.

What is sad in all this is the short-term, panicked vision. That kind of behaviour is what scares me most at the moment. We can feel that everyone associated with the Conservative government is afraid; they are afraid of being cut and they are afraid to speak out loud and clear.

• (1610)

I have seen constant examples of that fear from people who have come to testify about the cuts. It can even be seen in the Prime Minister's staff.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member to give us an example of how Archives Canada has revealed or provided evidence of an error made in the past and provided us with the opportunity to correct it, reconcile with the past and move forward to the future.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Madam Speaker, I have no doubt about the hon. member's good faith, but I did not really understand his question very well. However, I appreciate his candid, honest reaction.

I will simply say that, when I was at the demonstration 10 days ago, I met a man who told me how devastating it was to see that his work was being threatened. Actually, he was working on something that the hon. member might be able to relate to. He was involved with the archiving of aerial photographs of Canada. I do not recall their date, but they were clearly very old photographs. To take them, you needed a plane and a camera. That tells you how old they were. I am no aeronautical engineer or expert photographer, but it was still clear to me how relevant it was to have a portrait of Canada from the air at that point in time. And if those photographs are not archived properly, information will certainly be lost when someone is trying to talk about our country, about the erosion of riverbanks, or any kind of subject that has nothing political about it and does not deal

with the art of mime or dance. Those are things that should normally interest the hon. members opposite.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to listen to my colleague across the way denigrate the major investments we have made in education, research and commercialization. I want to read a couple of quotes that people from the university environment have made.

From the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the chair, the president of UBC, said:

In the face of tough fiscal choices, the government showed leadership by continuing its investments in research, innovation, research infrastructure and university-private sector collaborations...These investments will build a stronger future for our society and economy.

Paul Davidson, the president of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, said:

The budget provides new opportunities for talented graduate students to gain research experiences in companies across Canada...We're also pleased the budget recognizes the importance of deepening international education and research linkages.

This is feedback from people who are actually doing that research, directing it and benefiting by it. How can NDP members say that they have such great knowledge about the research that is being done when people like this are applauding the government—

The Deputy Speaker: I will have to give the hon. member time to respond.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Madam Speaker, I am being asked to respond, and I will respond, but honestly, the answer is self-evident because my colleague is giving me an example that has nothing to do with what I am talking about.

First, I invite him to go and see the people from Archives Canada, the people who are in the park and who are protesting. They could tell him about the people doing research at the University of British Columbia.

Second, this is classic. In Bill C-38, the government is deliberately including worthwhile things, such as the enhancement of the travelling exhibitions indemnification program, but it is also including a bunch of garbage. Then, I will be criticized for voting against the enhancement of assurances with respect to travelling exhibitions.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher for his excellent presentation and his contribution to this House. I will have the honour of running a relay race with him on June 24.

Knowing the importance of information and statistics to governance issues in any society—there is a saying that "knowledge is power"—I would like him to comment more on this shift that seems to be taking place on the other side of the House, judging by all the measures being proposed here.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Madam Speaker, first of all, the hon. member is right. We are going to jog and exercise together to have a sound mind in a sound body.

Second, in response to his question, I honestly think that the government is not interested in knowledge per se, because they do not have a long-term vision for our society. They are constantly looking for short-term solutions. So, in the short term, when a lobbyist comes in the door, they ask him what he wants and say, "Sure, man. We will do that for you."

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Madam Speaker, in response to the "Black Out Speak Out" national campaign that denounces Bill C-38, and in support of which members wore black buttons yesterday, the Minister of Natural Resources said, "We want people to know the facts, not the distorted or exaggerated version."

Frankly, this is an insult to our intelligence. The last thing this government wants is for people to know the facts. It would seem that they do not even want to know the facts themselves.

In my view, the Conservative government period will be the age of scientific darkness. The government is making cuts to science. Over the past year, 12 research organizations and programs have been eliminated in a number of areas: Statistics Canada, Citizenship and Immigration, Human Resources and Skills Development, Industry Canada, Public Safety Canada, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, to name a few.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is one of the hardest hit departments. Does the Prime Minister know that oceans are not just for warships? There are actually many coastal communities that rely on the sustainability of oceans.

The government cannot ignore it, but it does not seem to be bothered about it. In fact, it is so indifferent to it that it is making reckless cuts to Fisheries and Oceans, slashing \$80 million, including a number of layoffs in research and science-related areas.

It is ending the Experimental Lakes Area program in northern Ontario, it is eliminating the aboriginal inland habitat program, and it is cutting the funding for aquaculture sciences activities. Furthermore, it is eliminating the ocean population monitoring program at Fisheries and Oceans, which means, for this program alone, the abolition of 75 scientist positions.

We know that these cuts drastically reduce our ability to resolve marine pollution issues, such as the problems associated with municipal sewer systems, contaminated sites, the impact of pesticides on salmon and the effect of PCBs on killer whales.

I would like to stress what a Conservative member said just a few minutes ago, which was that the Conservatives were here to support and help the municipalities.

With all the cuts announced by the Conservatives over the past few weeks, the municipalities in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands region will not be able to pick up the slack and continue the scientific programs abolished by the Conservatives. The people in remote areas will not be able to take over.

In the Conservatives' view, which private sector organization would in fact be able to take over the scientific programs in the Gulf of St. Lawrence?

Furthermore, five research centres will be axed: the Freshwater Institute in Winnipeg, which works in cooperation with the Experimental Lakes Area in Ontario; the Bedford Institute of Oceanography in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia; the Institute of Ocean Sciences in Sidney, British Columbia; the Gulf Fisheries Centre in Moncton; and the Maurice Lamontagne Institute in Mont-Joli, in the Gaspé, in my riding.

The Maurice Lamontagne Institute is a centre of excellence in cutting-edge research in a number of scientific areas. The facility specializes in research and innovation in science. The institute also generates more than 400 jobs in a region where jobs are precious. These are well-paid jobs. The loss of 400 jobs means that 400 families will no longer be able to support themselves and that 400 families will soon be moving to another area, probably one of the larger cities.

Endangering or cutting 400 jobs in the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands will hit these people hard.

The Conservatives are making fools of themselves claiming that they are creating jobs, when they are actually cutting jobs in areas where employment is badly needed.

• (1620)

Clearly, they do not care about those jobs. We know their strategy. They say that all of those people can go work for less pay thanks to their employment insurance reforms. Maybe they can get McJobs or commute far from home, at least 100 km or maybe even to remote locations in Alberta. This reminds me of the bad old days when people were shipped off to work camps.

The Conservatives' disdain for coastal communities is blatantly obvious. They are planning to change fleet separation and owner-operator policies in the fisheries sector. These policies protect the culture of coastal communities that depend on fishing. The Conservatives' decision to eliminate fish habitat protection from the Fisheries Act proves that they do not care about the sustainability of fish stocks. We have to protect the whole ecosystem if we want to protect populations of fish that depend on other species for their survival. If the government eliminates the fleet separation policy, huge processing ships will move in, which could easily result in the same problems that we experienced in the 1990s, when fish stocks declined dramatically. We must not let that happen again. That is why we need science.

The Conservatives would know this if they listened to scientists. They are putting the lives of sailors and recreational boaters in danger by closing the search and rescue centres in Quebec City and in Newfoundland and Labrador. With their changes to employment insurance, the Conservatives are attacking coastal communities whose economic activities are mainly seasonal.

Canadians deserve better than a government that has no long-term vision. They deserve better than a government that makes decisions based on ideology. They deserve better than a government that tries to hide information from them. The culture of secrecy is so pervasive among the Conservatives that the government is muzzling scientists.

Business of Supply

To name just a few, consider the following examples: Dr. David Tarasick, a scientist at Environment Canada; Kristi Miller, a scientist at Fisheries and Oceans; and Scott Dallimore, a geoscientist at Natural Resources. They were all muzzled by this government. The Conservatives prohibited them from talking to the media about their research—research, I would point out, that is paid for by us, the taxpayers.

The research conducted by these scientists on climate change or on declining fish stocks is crucial to sound management in Canada. To slash funding for science means slashing the information needed to govern properly. How can the Conservatives claim to believe in science or to base their decisions on science if they cut funding for scientific research?

The Conservatives' war against science has long-term consequences that they are not taking into account. I want to emphasize the fact that in my region, we saw fish stocks collapse in the early 1990s. The economy in our region and that of the entire Gulf of St. Lawrence suffered greatly as a result. The communities in my region have had a very hard time recovering to where they were 20 years ago. Making the same mistake of not taking an accurate and thorough inventory of the fish stocks is a recipe for disaster.

While countries like Germany are increasing funding for basic research, Canada is at risk of losing its scientific expertise to other, more visionary countries. Is this government trying to trigger a brain drain? The Conservatives have forgotten that they are here to serve the public, not control the public. Canadians have the right to be informed. The Conservatives do not have the right to control information and to shut down scientific facts when findings do not suit them. That is the basis of morals and ethics. Of course to the Conservatives, whose ideology is taking us back to the Dark Ages, this seems perfectly normal.

The Conservatives are waging an ongoing war on research, data collection and the development of fact-based policies because these things interfere with their ideological agenda and force them to recognize embarrassing truths, such as the human causes of climate change.

That is why I am urging the government to support the motion of the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas. I am urging this government to drop the ideological rhetoric and make decisions based on scientific facts.

• (1625)

I am urging the government to get back on the right path and support scientific research for Canada's short- and long-term benefit.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in my opinion, this government fears criticism.

In the hon. member's opinion, what do the scientists who were muzzled have to say that could scare the government?

Mr. Philip Toone: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for his question.

Certainly, when scientists are muzzled, it is a great loss for Canadians. Canadians and all the scientists in the world can trust the research that Canadian scientists have done because it is sophisticated and renowned.

For example, there is the announced closure of the Experimental Lakes Area program in northwestern Ontario. This program is known throughout the world. It is an enormous loss for some Canadians to no longer have access to that research. The private sector cannot take over. When the federal government does this type of research, it is done over the short and long term and, most of the time, private companies are more interested in the short term.

My question is for the government: who exactly is going to take over?

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Madam Speaker, there seems to be a sense of fear on the government side, and it is a fear of too much information. There seems to be this need to just shut down all of the avenues of information that help Canadians and the government and the House work for Canadians.

Along with that, there is a sense of “Trust us, we know what we are doing. Trust us, the cheque is in the mail.”

The reason we have institutions like committees and outside arm's-length and very distant organizations to monitor certain things is to make sure that everything is done for the needs of Canadians.

Could my hon. colleague comment on that? The word “fear” has been used a couple of times by my colleague from the Liberals as well, so maybe he could say a few words on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber.

We do indeed appear to be going through a period in Canada where the government wants to operate in the dark. When people are afraid, they are less likely to complain. I can give as an example what is happening in the public service right now when layoffs are being announced. In some departments, a letter of termination will be sent to 20 or so employees, but they know that perhaps only four or five will actually be laid off.

This is creating a culture of fear that is harmful to sound scientific development. It pits employees against each other. It really means a loss of efficiency. The federal system will have at least a one-year period during which the public service will be frozen and it will be very difficult to cope in this situation. It is really very frightening.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges has 30 seconds for a final question.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, I totally agree with my colleague.

Even today, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans defended the fact that the government will no longer be conducting environmental analyses on small streams. It astounds me that the minister does not understand the facts of hydrology. We have seen this on a number of occasions from all the members of this government, who do not base what they say on science.

Can the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine tell us more about the cabinet's scientific ignorance?

Business of Supply

Mr. Philip Toone: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges for his question.

Up to now, I myself have been very disappointed in the work by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. I believe he is letting down the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

I would like to ask him the following question. What is he waiting for to do his job and defend what needs to be defended? I think that people want answers, but so far the only thing we are hearing from him is a lot of silence.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for St. Paul's.

Two days ago I had the privilege of giving a keynote address at the world congress for the Society for Brain Mapping and Therapeutics. As a former scientist, I was thrilled to hear about cutting-edge research regarding new technologies for imaging the brain, and the promise of stem cells and personalized medicine. I was pleased to share my work advocating for 2014 to be the Year of the Brain, and for a national brain strategy.

Science should be a driving force for public policy—for example in determining whether or not to put in place a national dementia strategy—and should always be impartial. By the way, the science is overwhelming that Canadians need to address this public health priority of dementia, which is a ticking time bomb.

Since the Conservatives came to power in 2006, there has, however, been a gradual tightening of media protocols for federal scientists. Researchers who once would have responded freely and promptly to journalists are now required to direct enquiries to a media relations office, which demands written questions in advance and still might not permit scientists to speak. Federal scientists are under growing surveillance and control. Numerous studies have shown a pattern of suppression, manipulation and a distortion of federal science. Officials have limited public access to scientific information.

Canadian journalists have documented numerous cases in which prominent researchers have been prevented from discussing published, peer-reviewed articles. For example, there is a Canadian government scientist whose work in the prestigious journal *Science* suggested that an unexplained virus was resulting in a higher death rate for some salmon. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans declined to make her available to the media for over 15 months.

An Environment Canada team concluded that a 2°C increase in global temperatures may be unavoidable by 2100. That is associated with dangerous climate change. Environment Canada's media office granted no interviews.

A Natural Resources Canada scientist could not talk about research into a flood in northern Canada 13,000 years ago without pre-approval from political staff in the office of the natural resources minister.

An Environment Canada scientist's research showed an unprecedented loss of ozone over the Arctic, a 2 million km² ozone hole. He was interviewed three weeks later, saying, "I'm available when media relations says I'm available."

I can attest not only to the muzzling but also to the fear of scientists. I used to consult for Environment Canada, and I have numerous friends who are scientists across Canada and the United States. Because of fear of retribution if they speak out, Canadian scientists often ask me to speak to American colleagues, who can freely comment on what is happening in Canada.

I had one friend who was so concerned that he or she wrote to me from the spouse's email account to my old university email account, and then explained that he or she would call on the spouse's cell phone from a busy mall so that the call could not be traced.

Surely everyone in this House should be outraged by the climate in which our scientists are being forced to perform. Surely everyone should be outraged by the quashing of dissenting opinions, by the war on democracy, environment and science.

Nature magazine, one of the world's leading journals, recently reported that policy directives confirm the government's little understanding of the importance of the free flow of scientific knowledge. The journal reported that, "rather than address the matter, the Canadian government seems inclined to stick with its restrictive course and ride out all objections".

The government's untenable position is coming under increasing pressure as a result of the scientific integrity policies taking shape in the United States. As environment critic for our party, I have repeatedly called on the government to recognize that Environment Canada's ability to protect environmental and human health depends on scientific excellence and integrity, and should therefore ensure that a scientific integrity policy is developed to foster the highest degree of accountability, integrity and transparency in conducting, utilizing and communicating science within and outside Environment Canada, and to protect the department's scientific findings from being altered, distorted or suppressed.

● (1635)

Recently, a symposium called "Unmuzzling Government Scientists: How to Re-open the Debate" was held at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Vancouver. The Conservative government's media policies were centre stage in the international spotlight. According to *Nature*, "The way forward is clear: it is time for the Canadian government to set its scientists free". We used to be praised internationally for our openness and now we are seen "as a pariah".

Business of Supply

During the symposium, journalist Margaret Munro said that during much of her career it was easy to reach federal scientists to talk about their published research, but in recent years that had changed dramatically. Now the government is taking control to quite incredible extremes. Munro said that federal scientists faced many layers of approval before they could speak to the media, even going all the way up to the Privy Council Office. Approved interviews are often taped. Sometimes when the timelines are too tight, journalists receive written lines approved by the government. Munro discovered that it was the result of a new governmental policy that said a single department should speak with one voice. However, as she rightly points out, science depends on debate and discussion. If there is only one voice, where is the scientific questioning, where is the debate?

Acclaimed climatologist, Professor Andrew Weaver, said that most scientists were frustrated with the policies and their inability to speak about their research, some so much so that they were looking for jobs outside the government.

Professor Thomas Pedersen, a senior scientist at the University of Victoria, said that he believed there was a political motive in some cases. For example, he thought that the federal government would prefer that its scientists did not discuss research that pointed out just how serious the climate change challenge was.

Yesterday was Black Out Speak Out, and Liberals stood in solidarity with organizations across the country, organizations that are committed to showing the Conservative government's consistent assault on democracy and the environment. Many of the 500 organizations that joined Black Out Speak Out joined because Canada's environment was being threatened by the government, destroying 50 years of safeguards through Bill C-38 and the 2012 economic action plan.

The Conservatives are severely cutting the budget for Environment Canada, gutting environmental legislation, cancelling the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, silencing dissent from environmental non-governmental organizations, continuing to muzzle government scientists and, in so doing, impacting our economy today and in the future.

Anyone who disagrees with the Prime Minister is told to sit down and shut up. All Canadians should ask who next will be under attack for voicing their opposition. Silence is not an option. It is time to stand up and speak up for democracy, the environment, science and Canada.

Shockingly, the environment minister says that concerns about the muzzling of scientists are being driven by a small number of impatient Canadian journalists. Specifically, he has stated:

There is an element in all of this controversy, second-hand information and criticism from the scientific community abroad responding to a few, a very small number of Canadian journalists who believe they're the centres of their respective universes and deserve access to our scientists on their timeline and to their deadlines, and it simply doesn't work that way.

The environment minister should stand up for science, for scientists, for unmuzzling researchers and for ensuring a scientific integrity policy so Canadians can receive the best science, cutting-edge science to ensure evidence-based decision making.

● (1640)

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Madam Speaker, the exposé from my colleague in the Liberal Party was very informative, but I would ask her to elaborate a little more. I was particularly interested to hear about muzzling scientists and the effect that has on Canadians' understanding of the situation we are in, especially with regard to the environment. If she could speak a little more on that, I would be very interested to hear it.

● (1645)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, we have a real problem on the environment right now. The government has slashed Environment Canada. These are severe cuts to Environment Canada. Last summer it announced cuts of 700 scientists and most recently 200 scientists. It muzzles its scientists. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy has been cut. This was started under a former Conservative prime minister. It provided good data on the economy and the environment. Its only mistake is that it produces evidence-based reports that do not fit with Conservative ideology.

The government shuts down its critics. Non-governmental organizations are being affected by changes at Canada Revenue Agency. It cannot silence its critics. We want all opinions and all evidence. This is a return to 1940s style McCarthyism.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in the United States, at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, there was an administrative order in December of last year which told its scientists in the United States that they should talk about their research to the public and even talk about their own personal opinions on government policy, as long as they made it clear it was their personal opinion.

In stark contrast to the Canadian government's policy, why would the United States government want its scientists talking to the public about their research?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, we want our scientists to speak to the public. We want them to share their information. This is their research. This research is paid by the public and they should have the opportunity to share that information.

There was a letter to the Prime Minister. It urged the government to allow freedom of speech for federal scientists. It said:

Despite promises that your majority government would follow principles of accountability and transparency, federal scientists in Canada are still not allowed to speak to reporters without the "consent" of media relations officers.

The letter was signed by several groups, including the Canadian Science Writers' Association, World Federation of Science Journalists, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression and the Professional Institute for the Public Service of Canada, which represents 23,000 federal scientists. It went on to say:

Business of Supply

Prime Minister, we want freedom of speech for federal scientists because we believe it makes for better journalism, for a more informed public, for a healthier democracy, and it makes it more likely that Canadians will reap the maximum benefit from the research they fund.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question will be brief.

I would like to know what my colleague, who has worked very hard on environmental issues, thinks about the cuts to the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

I am proud to belong to the NDP. Sustainable development is one of our values, and we link economic development with environmental protection.

What does she think of these cuts to the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy?

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, I know my hon. colleague well through the health committee, and he works very hard.

We are very disappointed by the cuts to the national round table. Our former colleague was the president and CEO of the round table for seven years. It is an important, unique in Canada, unbiased organization that provides economic and environmental data. It is about sustainable development, development that meets the needs of today without compromising those of the future.

My concern with the government is it pits the economy against the environment, and this is 1950s thinking.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am speaking on behalf of the Liberal Party, as I am the party's aboriginal affairs critic.

I agree entirely with the NDP motion, on this opposition day, on the cuts in scientific areas and on the muzzling of scientists, particularly with regard to the effects on first nations communities in Canada.

• (1650)

[*English*]

It is important to put this debate and the motion in context. These cuts are actually based in ideology, the belief of Conservatives that government does not have any role to play in terms of facilitating equal opportunity for Canadians or in the quality of life. This rigid ideology is focused on smaller governments and fewer social programs, leaving Canadians to fend for themselves.

In management talk, it is always that if it is measured, it gets noticed, and if it is noticed, it gets done. If we do not measure, it will not be noticed. It will be less demand for government to do something, and therefore it is content to do nothing.

We recently saw the Conservatives' indignant response to social inequality when the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food highlighted serious food insecurity issues in Canada, particularly in aboriginal communities. The Minister of Health stated that there was no problem in spite of the fact that a Canadian Medical Association

Journal article from the McGill scientists showed that 70% of Inuit preschool children were food insecure.

The Conservatives do not like these kinds of numbers. We have seen this strategy play out time and time again. First, they emphatically deny there is a problem, then savagely attack the credibility of those raising the issue. However, facts make the approach more difficult. Evidence makes knee-jerk denials less credible. Even the Minister of Health had to admit that maybe there was a problem, faced with a huge backlash from her community in the north and from Inuit and Métis Canadians across the country.

The Conservative government has no respect for evidence. The Conservatives want to rule by ideology, blind to the facts, blind to the reality of every day Canadians. This is neither competent, nor responsible government.

To facilitate this approach, the Conservative government has muzzled the scientists, as my colleague just stated, bullied non-governmental organizations and slashed programs focused on gathering and analyzing evidence-based data.

Both government and non-governmental sources have noted the lack of data quality regarding first nations, which inhibits a full understanding of the social and economic conditions of first nations people throughout Canada.

The First Nations Statistical Institute was established to fill this gap, to increase the quality and accessibility of first nations statistics to improve planning, decision-making and investment for all first nations as well as federal, provincial and territorial governments. One of its key roles was to work to build the expertise in capacity within first nations and their governments in the area of statistics and data.

With the cancelling of this initiative, it is puzzling why the Conservative government is not reinvesting the money into another initiative to deal with this critical first nations capacity gap. The reason is simple. The last thing the government wants is accurate data on the challenges faced by first nations in Canada.

Aboriginal Canadians are working to build sustainable prosperity in their communities, but they can no longer count on the federal government as a partner. Despite lagging first nation educational outcomes, the Conservatives have failed to address the growing \$2,000 to \$3,000 per student annual funding gap between students on reserve and those in provincial schools.

With first nations suicide rates five times the national average and Inuit suicide rates 11 times higher, the Conservatives are cutting the aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy.

Even though aboriginal Canadians are much more likely to suffer from diabetes and have significantly higher infant mortality rates and significantly lower life expectancy, the Conservatives are cutting aboriginal health programs in the national aboriginal health organizations as well.

The aboriginal diabetes initiative, the aboriginal health resources initiative and the aboriginal health transition fund have all been cut by the government.

The National Aboriginal Health Organization, NAHO, which was created as a response to the royal commission, will have to roll up its programs by the end of this month. Everywhere we have been in Canada we are hearing horror stories from the medical community as to what that means, the data that this organization has created, the knowledge translation and the toolboxes. It houses the *Journal of Aboriginal Health*. Everyone is asking who will do this essential work.

I note with some regret that the NDP motion is obviously narrow and is not able to deal with these cuts, but it underscores why generating accurate socio-economic and health statistics is so important.

Despite overcrowding rates on reserves six times those off reserve and more than 40% of on reserve homes in need of major repairs, the Conservatives have no plan to deal with the crisis in first nations housing.

Despite supporting a motion on the right to clean, safe running water, we see no new funding to upgrade the huge number of first nations waste and waste water systems, which the government's own national assessment determined to be either high or medium risk.

The Conservative government is turning its back on first nations, Métis and Inuit Canadians and the Canadian values of compassion, fairness and the tradition of evidence-based policy.

The Conservative government will argue that First Nations Statistical Institute work will be completed by other organizations, such as Statistics Canada or the First Nations Information Governance Centre. However, neither Statistics Canada nor the governance centre will address capacity development on first nations' governments in the area of data collection. Further, the government is not reinvesting the money saved from cutting the statistical institute and these other programs.

The Conservatives have killed the mandatory long form census. They have cut what first nations have called the count in accountability. It eliminates the ability to measure whether we are making progress and whether we are closing the gaps in health outcomes and educational attainment.

In killing the mandatory long form census, participation has dropped from 94% in 2006 to an abysmal 69% for the Conservatives new national household survey. It means that the data is no longer comparable. The worst part is that statisticians and policy-makers cannot identify which segments of the population were not counted by the NHS, which means that they are unable to measure the data's bias or rely on its accuracy.

Studies have shown that eliminating the mandatory long form census will negatively affect rural communities, ethnic groups, women, the poor and aboriginal Canadians. By eliminating the mandatory long form census, the Conservative government has essentially said that it wants to marginalize these Canadians. It does not want to measure, it does not want it to be noticed and it does not want to do anything. The Conservatives will no longer be able to

Business of Supply

help the poor, the disabled, ethnic or aboriginal communities because Canadians will not know they exist.

Rather than working with first nations, Inuit and Métis Canadians to develop solutions for the unacceptable socio-economic gaps between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians, the Conservatives' answer is to simply shut their eyes to these appalling programs. Again, if it is measured it gets noticed, if it is noticed it gets done. The Conservatives have chosen to stop measuring so it will not be noticed and, therefore, there will be no demand for the government to do anything.

It is a sad day for Canada and it really is a contempt of knowledge in this country. As Andrew Coyne said last year, "What was once a war on the elites is now a war on knowledge." The Conservatives should be ashamed.

• (1655)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am inclined to agree with the member that not all of these overt attacks on science, data, facts and knowledge are even about money.

I would ask the member for her view on one example that has come to light with the Experimental Lakes Area in northwestern Ontario through the Freshwater Institute in my home province of Manitoba, where it has been demonstrated that the research has paid for itself over and over again. It is a paltry \$2 million a year, and I do not say that lightly. Given the fact that it is unique in the world and internationally renowned and acclaimed, is it not more about shooting the messenger pre-emptively than even about saving money, when it is an almost insignificant amount of money when we are talking about a \$40 billion deficit?

By preface, I would like the member's views on one recent piece of research by these scientists. We knew that phosphates and nitrates going into Lake Winnipeg were bad so we were trying to eliminate them both. The scientists at the Baltic Sea had the same problem.

These scientists realized that if the phosphates were eliminated to reduce the algae bloom and the nitrates, it may in fact be counterproductive. We saved \$400 million by not going after the nitrates with the same zeal as the phosphates. In the Baltic Sea, they saved \$3 billion by concentrating their efforts where it was effective. It was all because the scientists were doing original research.

Does the member agree with me that this is not really about saving money, that this is about pre-emptively shooting the messenger to avoid messages the government does not want to hear?

• (1700)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. This is not really about saving money. It is about following an ideology.

Business of Supply

The government does have absolute contempt for basic research and for investigator-driven research where people have a hunch that a return on investment might not be tomorrow with a new drug, but that it will be in saving lives and actually improving the quality of life.

That institute has paid for itself time and time again. It is this very linear thinking by the government that the savings must be found in the same department or in the same part of a department. Whole of government approaches or how this country works is just of no interest to the government.

The government just wants to know how it can cut, and particularly cut the stuff that will find things that might be embarrassing and that it might have to act on.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was just looking at openparliament.ca, where I found a quote by the Minister of the Environment on February 6 in question period. He said, "Our government believes that what gets measured gets done". That is exactly what my colleague, the member for St. Paul's, said.

I think we should believe the minister when he says that in question period, of course. What that must mean is that if the government does not want to do something, it will try as hard as it can to avoid measuring it.

I was wondering if my colleague would comment on the relevance of that quote.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, it is a matter of choosing what we want to measure, choosing the issues upon which we want to act and choosing to actually shut down the measurements of the things that might be embarrassing.

In the industry committee hearings on the long form census, I remember the mayor of Iqaluit, Elisapee Sheutiapik, stating that his community wanted the long form census to measure the number of people living in any given home and the number of bedrooms. Up there, where it is too cold to be homeless, they wanted people to know so the government would then need to deal with the housing crisis in the north.

When the government was first elected it talked about liberally funded social science research as though it was one swear word, because the liberally funded social science research never proved the ideology. It only proved that its ideology was following the wrong path that would not get results.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

Today we are discussing a very important motion made by my colleague, the member for Burnaby—Douglas, whom I would like to thank.

I will read the motion, so that the people at home fully understand why this NDP initiative is important. This initiative aims to make the Conservative government take a step back with respect to all the cuts it is imposing on all federal government departments:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian scientific and social science expertise is of great value and, therefore, the House calls on the Government to end its

muzzling of scientists; to reverse the cuts to research programs at Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Library and Archives Canada, National Research Council of Canada, Statistics Canada, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada; and to cancel the closures of the National Council of Welfare and the First Nations Statistical Institute.

I just listed a number of programs that will be cut. However, these programs help various segments of the population. One cut that particularly bothers me is the abolition of the operating budget of the National Council of Welfare. Few Canadians know that body. It has a very small annual budget of \$1.1 million, which accounts for 0.0001% of the Government of Canada's budget.

A few weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development why she was cutting funding for this federal but independent organization, since it allows it to collect information on people living in poverty in Canada. Unfortunately, there are many of them, including seniors and families. We must help these people get out of poverty. In order to do so, we need information. The minister provided an absurd answer. She said some programs were redundant and that was the reason why she was cutting the budget of the National Council of Welfare.

Before talking about cuts, let us first describe the role of the National Council of Welfare, so that people at home really know what the Conservative government and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development are abolishing.

The National Council of Welfare was created by the Government Organization Act of 1969, to give advice to the Minister of Health and Welfare. The title was different at the time. Today, we refer to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

As I said, the council currently reports to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. Its mandate is to provide advice to the minister on social development issues that the minister submits to its review, or that the council deems appropriate to examine. In other words, the council acts as an advisor to the minister, so that she has a better knowledge of the plight of people living below the poverty line. She can then help the government make the right decisions. A government does not only represent those who voted for it. It represents people from all walks of life: the rich, the poor and the middle class. That is why the council has been in place since the 1960s.

The organization advises the minister on issues related to poverty, conditions faced by low-income Canadians, and related programs and policies, by communicating directly with the minister, imparting information, transferring knowledge and raising awareness of poverty-related issues among the various stakeholders and the general public.

One aspect of its activities is therefore to inform people through the media and its Internet site. I recommend consulting the site while it still exists. It contains a great deal of very important information as well as excellent studies conducted by the National Council of Welfare.

The council also gives those affected by poverty, in particular low-income Canadians, a way to inform the government of their points of view.

●(1705)

The organization fulfills its mandate and achieves its objectives by publishing many reports and managing a website on poverty and social issues; by submitting briefs to groups such as parliamentary committees—as a member of several parliamentary committees, I know that obtaining advice from experts in their areas of expertise is very important if the right decisions are to be made, even by the government—by commenting to the minister on issues raised at council meetings or in council reports; by meeting various stakeholders to encourage well-informed conversations on ways to address poverty; and by answering requests from researchers, the media and the public for reports on scientific data and other information about poverty, as well as related policies.

As I mentioned, the council publishes reports and informs the minister of its opinions on a wide range of issues. Some of the issues studied in recent years include income security programs, child benefits, the taxation system, income adequacy, employment programs, the judicial system, social services such as child care and child welfare, the costs of poverty and issues that affect certain populations, such as children, single-parent families and seniors.

In relation to the program, the council operates outside the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, and its reports are published under its own authority. The organization is therefore quite independent, at least for as long as it continues to exist.

The council secretariat also operates independently from the department with respect to the department's responsibilities to the council, while it discharges its administrative and financial responsibilities in compliance with public service standards.

Earlier, I mentioned some of the issues that have recently been studied by the council. These show that it is a very serious body that addresses very important Canadian issues, whether we are talking about the 1960s or the 2000s. Poverty issues are still important today. Far too many people live in poverty in Canada.

I reported what the minister answered a few months ago when I asked her why the government was cutting this program. She referred to program redundancy, adding that she felt the role of the council was no longer necessary or important. However, she forgot to mention that the National Council of Welfare was the only organization to advise the minister on poverty-related issues in Canada.

By cutting the lifeblood from this organization, the Conservatives were fully aware that they were getting rid of its expertise. They wanted it to die so that they would not have to hear the demands of people living in poverty in Canada. It is quite absurd to eliminate a program that has proved its worth and that, even today, is still dealing with matters that are very important for Canada.

After my remarks in the House and the minister's response, I made a public statement in the media. I was delighted to receive testimonials from people working in their communities all across Quebec, and in whose eyes the National Council of Welfare is very important. I am going to quote some of their responses so that hon. members can see that I am not the only one to feel that it is important

Private Members' Business

to have the National Council on Welfare. It is important to many other community organizations.

Let me start with Ginette Dionne, the coordinator of Les Gens Oubliés in Hébertville. This is what she said: “Les Gens Oubliés in Hébertville, an organization that stands up for the individual and collective rights of people receiving income security, wishes to support the position that you—meaning me—are taking to urge the federal government to reverse its decision to end funding for the National Council of Welfare. The NCW is a source of important information for community groups engaged in fighting poverty. It is critical for us that it continue to operate.”

Then, Joan Tremblay, the president of and Quebec City spokesperson for the Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté, responded as follows: “Behind the numbers, we can clearly see what is upsetting the government. The council is not just providing it with information and advice on developing and assessing its social policies, it is also informing civil society, which can now verify the soundness of any government action.”

●(1710)

Nancy Lemay, coordinator of the CLÉ en éducation populaire de Maskinongé, wrote this:

Being in an environment where we work daily with people living in poverty and social exclusion, we believe it is imperative to keep an organization that informs the federal government about issues related to poverty and the living conditions of impoverished people and advises the government on programs and policies related to those issues.

Marie-Ève Duchesne, the spokesperson for the Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec, had this to say:

For our organization and its member groups, the NCW has always been an outstanding information tool with respect to the quality of its presentations on the realities of impoverished individuals—

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to the order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, June 6, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

●(1715)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. minister have the consent of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from April 24 consideration of the motion that Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cyberbullying), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond has three minutes to finish his speech.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise again today to speak to Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cyberbullying). In the little time I have left today, I will focus primarily on good examples of action taken by the community in my riding of Drummond to fight bullying and cyberbullying.

In my riding, the Sûreté du Québec is very committed to the fight against violence and bullying. Officer Daniel Jutras visits schools and gives presentations to raise awareness. Mr. Jutras does an excellent job. He has made several presentations this year, at schools in Saint-Cyrille-de-Wendover and Saint-Germain-de-Grantham among others, as a result of the hard work of parent and citizens' committees.

In Saint-Germain-de-Grantham, the Groupe de soutien d'aide aux victimes d'intimidation, a parent-run committee in the town, organized an evening presentation on bullying. It was a great success: many people attended, and young and old alike showed keen interest.

Bullying affects society as a whole. It is very important to adopt a preventive—rather than a legislative and punitive—approach to bullying. Our work must really focus on prevention. There are a lot of people doing just that in my riding. For example, there is a parents' committee of the Des Chênes school board that had as its guest Jasmin Roy, the founder of the Jasmin Roy Foundation, and an anti-bullying advocate. He came to Drummondville and gave an excellent presentation. Once again, both young and old were interested in his presentation. Everybody had questions or comments on the issue. As a society, this issue concerns us all.

I think that it is important that all levels of government get involved in the fight against bullying and cyberbullying. Not only is it a hot-button issue, it is an age-old societal problem that must be addressed, so that we can live in a better society.

If time permits, I would also like to say that it is important to understand bullying in order to address it. Human beings need to learn to live together with all their differences; the great riches of humanity are to be found in its plurality and diversity. I think that this fits in well with our goal of combatting bullying and cyberbullying through prevention. That is the first step, and everybody needs to get on board.

• (1720)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this evening's debate. I enjoyed my hon. colleague's speech. I know that there were other speeches made the last time the bill was debated in this House. All members in this House agree that it is important to combat cyberbullying.

I would also like to thank my hon. colleague from Vancouver Centre for introducing this bill in the House. This is an important issue in every region of the country.

[English]

It is somewhat ironic that we are speaking about cyberbullying legislation on the day that the Ontario legislature passed Bill C-13,

the provincial government's anti-bullying legislation. Of course, there are fundamental differences between these two pieces of legislation. Bill C-273 is certainly not as controversial as the Ontario bill seems to be, but it is an extremely important piece of legislation on an extremely important issue. Bill C-273 would clarify the existing law in the Criminal Code as it applies to cyberbullying by amending the code.

This issue affects many families in Nova Scotia, as well as in other provinces and territories. There are way too many examples of it. Who of us has not experienced or witnessed bullying when we were in school ourselves? When I was in school, we certainly did not have the added concern of being exposed to bullying on the Internet with people talking anonymously about us and posting disturbing pictures. There are many things that happen today.

I heard from a parent in my riding whose daughter has been bullied since last October. The incidents started in school, there were incidents in class that were addressed by the school, but then they continued in the hallway. Kids would giggle as she walked by and so forth. The impact on this child, of what may seem to us as not that serious as adults, was truly tragic.

For instance, she does not want to go to school now. She refuses to go, if members can imagine. She is obviously very unhappy. She is at home and angry about the situation she is in. This is a case where bullying has affected the entire family. Her parent feels the pain of not being able to help or protect her daughter and her siblings have to deal with her behaviour.

It is clear that teenagers, at the most difficult time in life in many ways, find this kind of abuse difficult if not impossible to ignore and very hard to cope with. Since we have all been teenagers, I think we all have a pretty good idea of what that sort of thing feels like and what a difficult and emotional time it can be.

Despite the impact it was having on her at the time, the daughter did not tell anyone. She did not want to tell anyone that she was being bullied because she did not think that there was anything that could be done about it. She was afraid that telling would make it worse. She perceived that she would be with those kids for the rest of the year, spending a lot of time around the children who were bullying her, and the fact that they would have been told to stop or punished in some way would not have had any long-term effect in helping her.

We have had other examples of this in Nova Scotia, unfortunately, and some have been well publicized.

There was a young woman named Jenna Bowers-Bryanton of Nova Scotia who took her own life on January 17 of last year after being harassed at school and through a social networking site.

Private Members' Business

In recent weeks, if members can imagine, a person on Facebook has purported to be a leader of a group called Libya Torial, whatever that is supposed to be, that allegedly drove three Nova Scotia girls to kill themselves. It is hard to imagine that anyone would want to claim credit for that, to say that they are the group that bullied these poor kids to the point where things were so awful for them that they wanted to kill themselves.

● (1725)

All of us, whether as parents, parliamentarians or individuals of society kind of want to say to a young person, especially a teenager who is going through that kind of difficult time, "No matter how hard it gets, you can handle it, and no matter how bad it gets, it will get better". Those are two very important messages that we have to give to young people. However, they are not the answer. That is not how we address the problem. It is just one small step to try to support the person who is going through this kind of difficulty.

Another person from Nova Scotia who was targeted was Courtney Brown, who very sadly committed suicide. In Ontario, in June of last year, there was a 16-year-old girl who was violently attacked at school by two other girls while another student videotaped the attack and later posted it on YouTube. That is just awful.

Bullying is why a young fellow, Travis Price of Nova Scotia, founded the Pink Shirt Day, after a fellow student was bullied for wearing a pink shirt to school. Thank goodness that does not happen to us here because lots of us like to wear pink shirts. They look good. Interestingly, I heard a presentation from a folklorist in Nova Scotia, Clary Croft, who is an expert in costume and clothing over the centuries. He talked about how a hundred years or so ago when pink first came into public awareness, it was a man's colour and blue was considered a woman's colour. My colleague from Winnipeg North says it still is.

Travis was so concerned about seeing the bullying, he started Pink Shirt Day, this movement across the country where one day each year kids in schools wear pink shirts to say they are against bullying.

It is important that all of us as adults, and everyone in society, say that bullying is wrong. We need to send a message to people who are perpetrators, whether in a moment of dislike, on the Internet when they are anonymous at home and are able to put something up very quickly, or whether it is more deliberate. We want to say to people that this is wrong and they should think about what they are doing and the pain they are causing.

One of the things about the Internet is that so often the perpetrator does not see the impact of what is happening. We know one of the values, for instance, of healing circles, which the aboriginals in our country have used for so long, is that the person who has committed some harmful act is forced to confront the person who has been harmed by it and to consider the impact. That is why restorative justice has been very valuable.

The problem here is that sometimes it is impossible to identify the perpetrator because there are websites where they can post things anonymously. With YouTube they can use a false name, or they can impersonate someone. In fact, they can impersonate the person they are bullying. That is a form of bullying.

This is not easy, but it is very important that governments do what they can to address this, that we enable police to get access to information about who is doing what. I am not endorsing what we have heard before from the Minister of Public Safety, but I think we all recognize that there is a need to take measures to try to stop this kind of thing.

We have a case in Nova Scotia where a young person was bullied, on Facebook I believe it was. That person is going to ask the court that his or her name remain confidential when the bully is sued. I know the media does not like that. Some members of the media have actually opposed this request. I understand their reasoning. However, in a case like this when we consider the harm of cyberbullying, it is important to protect that person as much as possible and not compound it. How else are they going to have an answer to this?

Mr. Speaker, I see you rising, which tells me I am at the end of my time. However, I want to congratulate my colleague for Vancouver Centre for bringing forward this bill on this important issue. I look forward to supporting it.

● (1730)

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak at second reading debate on Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cyberbullying).

I would like to thank the member for Vancouver Centre for introducing Bill C-273 and for giving us the opportunity to discuss this very current issue of cyberbullying.

The issue of bullying and cyberbullying is an important issue for Parliament to discuss. I can say with certainty that those of us on this side of the House stand with those who have been bullied. We are concerned with the issue of bullying and cyberbullying. In fact, as I am sure members are aware, the issue is currently being studied by the Senate committee on human rights.

Despite my concerns relating to the issue of bullying and cyberbullying, I will not be voting in support of Bill C-273 as I think that criminal legislative reform, if indeed any is needed, should await the outcome of the Senate committee review. Further, should the Senate committee recommend criminal law reform, reforms may well be very different from those proposed in Bill C-273. This is, of course, why we are having the Senate review. It is incumbent upon us to get the best advice possible before we proceed with any legislative changes.

I would like to add that my opposition to Bill C-273 should not be interpreted to mean that the government is not interested in the issue of bullying or cyberbullying. It is. The government takes the protection of Canada's youth very seriously, and has been very active over the past few years in areas related to bullying. I am going to speak to a few of those.

Private Members' Business

Specifically, the National Crime Prevention Centre and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police run a number of programs that target youth who are at risk for bullying-type behaviour. The NCPC has funded approximately 30 projects since 2007, which have addressed primarily youth violence and bullying. Additionally, the NCPC has developed resources for the Canadian public on evidence-based interventions to effectively address bullying.

The RCMP run seven outreach initiatives and program activities which address the issue of cyberbullying. One such example is deal.org, a for youth, by youth web initiative to inform youth about youth crime and victimization. The website also contains a cyberbullying fact sheet, an online interactive cyberbullying game and various blog posts on the topic of cyberbullying.

The RCMP also partners with several national organizations with respect to bullying and cyberbullying. In December 2011, in collaboration with PREVNet and researchers at the University of Victoria, the RCMP began piloting the WITS programs for the prevention of peer victimization and bullying, including cyberbullying. WITS stands for walk away, ignore, talk it out and seek help.

Through this partnership, RCMP members have already engaged in many schools and with children in the program's activities. The provinces and territories are also very active in developing and implementing anti-bullying initiatives. Many have also introduced amendments to their education or schools acts in an attempt to more effectively manage what appears to be a growing challenge. Bullying behaviour, as a social phenomenon, has been around for a very long time. The previous speaker mentioned that any of us who have been in school or who have kids in school are familiar with issues of bullying. We have all witnessed this taking place.

It is the relatively new phenomena, though, of cyberbullying that has grabbed the attention of the public, the media and now, today, our Parliament. Over the past number of years we increasingly heard more about it, and this is primarily because of the social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. According to the Nielsen Company in the United States, 22% of the average Internet user's time on line is spent on social media. In fact, a 2008 *Reuters* news article reported that social media is the top online activity. It is clear that social media is a popular way of connecting people, but it also has its risks.

• (1735)

To this end, the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights has been conducting a study on the issue of cyberbullying, in part to address Canada's international human rights obligation under article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is to protect children from all forms of neglect, abuse and exploitation.

The committee hearings are ongoing, and it has heard from a number of child advocacy stakeholders, as well as persons who have been affected by cyberbullying. The committee must table this important report no later than October 31, 2012. I believe it would be wise for Parliament to await this report before undertaking any criminal law reform in this area.

With regard to this bill specifically, there are two concerns that relate to the amendments proposed to the criminal harassment and defamatory libel provisions. One, the amendments are not needed, as

courts have already interpreted these two provisions as applying to behaviour committed via the Internet. Two, these amendments to only some of the applicable offences may lead to interpretation difficulties with respect to other unnamed Criminal Code offences.

I will delve into this second issue a little further. The Criminal Code already possesses a number of offences that are applicable to bullying behaviour, including those amended by the bill, but others as well, such as intimidation, section 423; uttering threats, section 264.1; and robbery, section 343, among others.

As mentioned, Bill C-273 only proposes to clarify that criminal harassment and defamation can be committed using a computer. Not clarifying that the other offences can also be committed using a computer may lead to those other offences being interpreted to only apply to behaviour that is not committed using a computer. In other words, by mentioning via computer in one section, this could signal to the courts that Parliament's intent is to exclude behaviour committed via computer from other offences.

In closing, I would like to take another opportunity to thank the hon. member for Vancouver Centre for raising this important issue of cyberbullying. It is an issue that I believe deserves Parliament's attention. However, we should also consider the issue when we have the benefit of the report from the Senate committee that is currently vested with this review.

I know that, while all of us in this House oppose bullying and oppose cyberbullying, this is not a motion; this is a bill, and a bill has a consequence in law. It is our responsibility, as legislators, to make sure that, when we pass a bill into law, it has the effect we want it to have. Unfortunately, this bill would not be Parliament's best effort.

We should await the Senate committee review and take the advice that comes from that review. We know it is actively hearing from witnesses. We know some of those witnesses include people who have been cyberbullied. We look forward to the report.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I rise—in the time that has been allocated to me today—to carry out one of the duties of public office in the Canadian Parliament, I find myself able to draw on my relevant experience as a criminal defence lawyer and on empirical and theoretical legal notions.

The first thing that struck me when I began my term here in Parliament was that more of my colleagues have a background in law than in political science. I simply wanted to mention this. Young people who have their sights set on political office and are deciding what to study at university should consider studying law.

My speech today on cyberbullying will give me an opportunity to draw on my professional experience in both private practice and as a legal aid lawyer. I will briefly review my experience.

Private Members' Business

After passing the bar exam in 2006, I started working in legal aid. I articulated for six months. My articling supervisor at the time was Bernard Lynch, a criminal lawyer. From 2006 to 2007, I worked on approximately 400 cases with the same employer. Much of the subject matter in those cases would today be considered cybercrime. I will put all of this into context.

In 2006, I was called upon to work on a case involving child pornography. I represented a client who was charged with storing information of a deviant nature on his computer—information and photographs that involved minors—and also with sharing that information with people in the United States. That was my first introduction to cybercrime.

I opened my own legal practice in 2010, and in 2011 I worked on four other cases involving youth. Three minors and an adult were co-accused. They were all charged with the same offence: uttering racially motivated hate speech on the Internet, making this publicly available in chat rooms, and uttering death threats and threats of bodily harm to individuals and designated groups, including aboriginals.

I asked myself how I ended up with these cases, since I myself am a member of the Uashat community. I am the lawyer who handled these cases. The young people claimed to belong to a skinhead movement, which was not proven.

We can see the evolution of these cases, and my comments today are based on my personal and professional experience.

In retrospect, some day I will be able to boast about the fact that I witnessed first-hand the expansion of cybercrime. Offences involving the inappropriate use of electronic devices were certainly common when I first started working as a jurist with the judicial district of Mingan, in 2006, but it is only over the years that accusations about the hate-related nature of comments made online reached unprecedented levels, including with our youth.

I mentioned that in 2006 it was an adult who was charged. Over time, I noticed a kind of democratization of that offence, if I may say so. Indeed, by 2011, many more young people were targeted and they were making much greater use of social media. So, something which, at the beginning, was an offence involving distinctive groups, including adults with a sexual deviance, has now spread to young people in general.

It is only after discussing the issue with the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord that it seemed relevant to present my thoughts to the public. My years of practice with young people have gradually led me to adopt a pragmatic view of the situations involving offences committed by minors. My knowledge of the principles of gradation for sentences under the Youth Criminal Justice Act lead me to believe that, depending on the seriousness of a case, the courts try to identify sentences other than remand, such as ordering that a young offender be put in a youth centre.

● (1740)

During the discussions on the letter of the bill before us and on the advisability of the measures to adjust sanctions applicable to cyberbullying, I presented to my colleagues numerous elements that are used as benchmarks to write a pre-sentence report.

A pre-sentence report is part of the criminal justice system for youth but also for adults, for which the same type of report is sometimes written. That is always done at the request of the defence attorney, or of the crown prosecutor. Personally, in a given situation or case, when I would see that a young person was very likely to be found guilty of an offence, I would invite him to cooperate with social workers. Usually, it was the social worker dealing with the young person. When a request is made for a pre-sentence report, the social worker ultimately meets the young offender and writes a report that mentions, among other things, the young person's risk of reoffending, his ability to reintegrate the community—that ability is rather obvious in the case of a young person, but less so in the case of an adult—and the support that he enjoys, both at a social and family level.

The report's conclusions will include a recommendation to the judge regarding the sentence to be handed down. I wanted to explain that aspect.

As my colleagues were told during consideration of the bill, my experience in the field allows me to say that it is quite unlikely that a minor, with no previous summary conviction offences in the area of criminal harassment—a summary conviction offence is a type of criminal offence, the other type being an indictable offence, well, it is a little bit complicated—defamatory libel or false messages, would be sentenced to a period in a youth facility.

The bill under consideration aims at updating the Criminal Code so that it gives greater coverage to certain offences perpetrated using a computer or on the Internet. This update is essential in this era of social networks and electronic communications.

That being said, the effect of the massive use of social media by young people will have to be weighed. As I pointed out at the beginning, we have seen that their use has been gradually increasing. They were used a little less in 2006 and, in 2011, they were used quite widely. Young people use social media quite commonly. Their passion for electronic communication is such that provision should be made for an alternative dispute resolution process or mechanisms for assessing the appropriateness of diversion for cases that otherwise would be tried summarily under the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

When I refer to diversion, I am speaking about all the alternative measures that can be used within the community, within the existing system, to support a young person, rather than prosecuting a case and saddling that person with such a liability, especially when the charge is less serious, as in the case of cyberbullying.

I am well aware that the courts today work in conjunction with social workers and the community to determine whether it would be appropriate, in a particular case, to find an alternative to confining the young person in an institution or perhaps even prosecution. At that point, judges will often try to find an alternative.

Private Members' Business

● (1745)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with the growing popularity of social media comes the growing problem of cyberbullying. Those who have been bullied on the Internet can attest to the anger, shame and powerlessness they feel when personal information or a photo taken without their knowledge is posted online.

In 2002, Ghyslain Raza, a young boy from Trois-Rivières, saw a video of himself posted on YouTube without his consent. That video was viewed by millions of people around the world. The young boy, who was 14 at the time, suffered a deep depression and had to be hospitalized.

Bullying, defamation and harassment should not be tolerated because they can cause serious harm and irreparable damage. Using email or social media to commit these acts does not make them acceptable either.

What is the definition of cyberbullying? Education expert Bill Belsey describes it like this:

Cyberbullying is the use of information and communication technologies, such as email, cellphone, pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal websites and defamatory online personal polling websites, to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others.

Cyberbullying therefore includes all of the elements involved in the usual forms of bullying, but transposes them to an online and highly public environment.

On social networking sites like Piczo, Facebook and MySpace, bullies often focus on chat rooms because they are very popular. Messages, photographs and videos can have a devastating impact on victims because they are seen by thousands or even millions of people and because the bullying can go viral.

According to a Statistics Canada survey, approximately 7% of adult Internet users are bullied over the Internet. The risk is higher for some people, including young adults, where the rate is 17%. It is also likely that young people who are already experiencing integration problems or being harassed at school are more likely to be cyberbullying targets. People perceived as different are also targeted: homosexuals, people with a physical or mental disability and immigrants, for example.

In 2009, University of Toronto professors Faye Mishna and Robert MacFadden carried out a study of more than 2,000 students in the greater Toronto area. The results were alarming. Over 21% of students—one in five—said that they had been victims of cyberbullying.

The Montreal police force also conducted a survey of young people, which indicated that 27% of young people aged 9 to 17 say they have been victims of bullying or harassment on the Internet.

Kids Help Phone also conducted a survey of young people in 2007. The responses are heartbreaking. The young people said that the bullying often involves students who already know each other. For example, one young person confided:

I was playing Habbo Hotel [an online game] and the person (since I'm black) made fun of my race. They called me bad words and names....

Most of the time the people bullying me online were the same people that were bullying me in real life, but used technology to escalate it and make the pictures/rumours spread faster and farther.

So it is important not to underestimate the psychological impact that cyberbullying can have on young people.

Another girl confided:

About six months ago my friend or my so-called friend had a hate page on her website and I was on it there were many names that just weren't necessary to say. I felt like she betrayed me I felt angry I couldn't help it, then people started making fun of me at school and I had no self-confidence so I started to hurt myself and everyone found out then I was just so scared of what they were going to do to me that I almost committed suicide.

As a teacher, I saw students faced with cyberbullying problems a number of times, and I can attest that the effects are devastating and that young people feel completely lost and destitute.

The bill introduced by the member for Vancouver South aims to amend three sections of the Criminal Code in order to include cyberbullying. In fact, it is proposing amendments to sections 264, 298 and 372 of the Criminal Code. They deal with criminal harassment, defamatory libel and false messages, respectively.

● (1750)

Amendments to section 264 of the Criminal Code would mean that repeated communication using a computer or similar device, or a threatening attitude causing a person to be concerned for his safety, would be considered harassment. The amendment to the other two sections serves the same purpose: to broaden the scope of the code to include the use of a computer in the commission of a crime.

The spirit of this bill is worthy. It aims to eliminate any grey areas or ambiguity in the law to ensure that cyberbullying, when a crime is involved, is penalized.

We obviously agree with the spirit of the bill. We do, however, have misgivings about the implementation of this legislation when it comes to young people. We are afraid that the bill will lead to the criminalization of behaviour among young people that could be modified through education and awareness building, in other words, through more prevention.

The many studies conducted by Professor Belsey, the founder of bullying.org, led him to the conclusion that bullying is a behaviour that can be influenced and therefore changed. He observed that the best way of addressing such behaviour is through education and awareness building. When consulted about Bill C-273, Professor Belsey said the following: "Bullying is a behaviour and is therefore very fluid. Should a child be threatened with expulsion every time he behaves in this way? If that were the approach, there would be no children left at school. Since bullying is an acquired behaviour, it also means that with a little bit of help and support, these behaviours can be changed."

Private Members' Business

When it comes to education and awareness building, Canada could draw inspiration from a Finnish program called KiVa, considered one of the best in the world. The objective is to influence “witnesses” of acts of bullying and encourage them to intervene. Instead of expelling the culprits, a dialogue takes place between the bully, his victim and other student witnesses. The program has really helped to rekindle young people’s interest in school and to make students more motivated and successful. After just one year, victimization and harassment had dropped markedly, and KiVa won the European award for crime prevention.

Here, too, prevention programs are beginning to appear. The RCMP and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation have joined forces to design presentations that target students from grades 4 to 12. They are teaching youth how to recognize, respond to and prevent this behaviour.

In Quebec, several police services have joined forces to create “Vous NET pas seul”, a program to prevent cyberbullying. The program’s objectives include inviting young people and their parents to be vigilant when surfing the Internet. There are two components—one for teenagers, which aims to inform them of the dangers of careless surfing, and one for parents, which demystifies the Internet and gives advice on safety and monitoring.

Sites like WebAware explain the various forms of cyberbullying and its legal consequences and provide young people and parents with tips on how to protect themselves.

The Sûreté du Québec is working with several school boards to increase awareness about the problem among youth. In my riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry, Isabelle Pépin, a school psychologist, is intervening in this area at Edgar-Hébert secondary school. In order to be successful when it comes to this issue, she believes that everyone needs to get involved: governments, parents, teachers, students and the general public—basically society as a whole. We must say no to all forms of bullying and cyberbullying in particular.

Perhaps the computer gives us a degree of anonymity that prevents the development of a feeling of empathy towards the victims because there are no direct links between the bully, the victims and the witnesses, but we must remember that real people are hiding behind the aliases.

I hope that this bill will help to make people aware of the dangers of cyberbullying, but my colleagues and I believe that amendments should be considered when the bill is studied in committee. Young people should not be put in prison. They and their parents should be made aware of the problem. By giving ourselves proper tools, we can change behaviour and prevent cyberbullying.

●(1755)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to address an issue that is really important. I know the member for Vancouver Centre has taken on an issue that has a huge impact. If we were to talk to the average Canadian, they would recognize that cyberbullying is there, it is real and it is an issue that does need to be addressed.

I believe the member for Vancouver Centre, who I have come to know over the last year, has recognized that this Parliament needs to

address the issue today, and I applaud her for taking it on. Through her, the Liberal Party has come to grips with this issue and recognizes that the bill must go to the committee stage.

The speaker before me from the New Democratic Party made the suggestion that there could be some amendments. One of the things I do know about the member for Vancouver Centre is that she does approach things with an open mind and we can rest assured that she will be open to amendments.

We have a bill before us today that, with the support of the Conservatives and the New Democrats, could be sent to committee.

At the end of the day, Canadians will be well-served by recognizing the efforts of the member for Vancouver Centre in bringing forward the bill. We need to take advantage of this opportunity by allowing the bill to be debated in committee, allowing members to call upon witnesses who have the expertise on this particular topic and potentially making the bill even better. This is not to take anything away from the current bill because I believe the current bill accomplishes a great deal and, at the very least, is a great starting point for us.

We have had a lot of discussion about cyberbullying and the impact that it has on young people. Yes, it does have a serious and significant impact on young people, but this bill deals with people of all ages. Cyberbullying impacts people of all ages. It has no discrimination in that sense. That is one of the reasons I believe that Canadians of all ages and all backgrounds have a vested interest in this particular issue and should be taking notes on what is taking place this evening. We as a House have a wonderful opportunity to take what is a serious issue and bring it to the next level.

We are talking about a bill that would have an impact on all ages because of cyberbullying. We are talking about people in the workplace. How many individuals are discredited through YouTube or Facebook by someone who hides behind a computer and takes on an unknown name believing that he or she can do and say whatever it is that he or she wants. It may be something against a colleague who might be looking for a promotion, it may be something that is very mean-spirited or it may be the spreading of a false rumour in a workplace environment and the impact that would have on an individual.

●(1800)

We can think about it in terms of the community as a whole. Maybe it is a next-door neighbour or someone who has it in for a person who has actually done nothing wrong. Rumours are created because people say something on the Internet or on Facebook using a false name and believe they can get away with it.

There are consequences to those types of actions. We hear of depression. If people find out on some website that someone is claiming an action or maybe posting pictures that would compromise them, they often end up in a very serious depression that will often lead to suicide.

Private Members' Business

This is one of the reasons we need to take this issue seriously. Over the last 10 or 15 years, the Internet has grown so that it is in every home, most businesses and every environment we can imagine in Canadian society. We need some safety in the form of legislation such as this that would deal with the negative sides of the Internet. We often talk about the benefits of the Internet, but there are aspects of it that cause serious problems in society. That is the reason we need to bring in legislation to resolve some of the potential consequences of causing mischief on the Internet. That mischief often leads to very cruel actions that could potentially lead to someone committing suicide.

That is why I stand in my place today to encourage the government to think beyond today to tomorrow and to think of the thousands of victims out there. The House of Commons has a role to play. If we pass this bill today, ideally unanimously, we would be saying to Canadians that we understand the seriousness of cyberbullying and that we are prepared to allow this bill to go to the next stage. That next stage is committee, and once it is in committee, if the government wants to see some amendments or the NDP has ideas or the member for Vancouver Centre has some other ideas to share, there would be a will to see that take place.

I like to think that all members would, at the very least, recognize the need to address this very real issue. The member for Vancouver Centre and the Liberal Party have recognized that, which is why we are behind the bill and want to see it not only voted on but go to committee and ultimately go out of committee, so that it can come back in report stage and third reading and become the law of Canada. We need to recognize not only the importance of the Internet but also that we could improve the Internet by bringing forward the legislation being proposed here this afternoon.

I look forward to the Conservative Party and New Democratic Party recognizing, as we recognize, the importance of that issue and allowing the bill to go to committee.

•(1805)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas, I will let him know I will need to interrupt him at 11 minutes after the hour, so he will have roughly three to four minutes at most.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support the bill and to congratulate the member for Vancouver Centre for bringing it forward. This issue is important to her, and I share her concerns.

Bill C-273, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cyberbullying), has been brought forward to really slightly redefine criminal harassment, defamatory libel and legislation pertaining to false messages. It is a good bill and one that we should support.

This issue is especially pertinent in my riding of Burnaby—Douglas. Last year we had quite a local controversy. It was about bullying in general, but also cyberbullying. We had a number of charges of cyberbullying within our local school system toward LGBT community members in our riding. That launched a purple letter campaign by local constituent Kaitlin Burnett, which really

took off. It was an effort to get all members of the community to act against bullying.

To show that this kind of bullying is real, during the municipal election we had a small political party slate form that was against this purple letter campaign and against changing any laws that would reduce bullying toward the LGBT community. Heated debates were held all the way through the municipal election campaign about this issue. I strongly support the purple letter campaign and this bill to strengthen measures against cyberbullying, because it is very real.

Most Canadians also believe in this. I have here some polling from Angus Reid showing that a vast majority of Canadians agree that bullying now extends beyond face-to-face or even written bullying to the Internet as well. This is a very real issue. It is real for Canadians and it is real for my constituents.

I hope members on the other side of the House will join with us and support this important private member's bill.

•(1810)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the members of the House who have spoken in support of the bill. I also want to thank the Canadian Teachers' Federation and the Canadian police boards for also supporting the bill.

I want to assure everyone in the House that the bill is not bringing a new provision into the Criminal Code. Within the Criminal Code there already exist criminal sanctions against criminal harassment, defamatory libel and false messages, and they pertain to all forms of communication, including print media, radio, speech on the phone, et cetera.

All the bill is doing is adding cyberspace or a computer to the list of things that are already there, so the bill is not changing anything. It is adding a new form of communication to the communications messages that the already existing component of the Criminal Code pertains to.

I heard people speak, and I heard a lot of them being concerned about children. Bullying is one thing. Bullying occurs in schools. The difference between bullying and cyberbullying is that a lot of people do not bully each other in their community or in their workplace because we can see them doing it. It is not adult behaviour, and people are ashamed to do it.

What has happened is that since cyberspace and social media have occurred, people who would not be caught doing this face to face are now using social media to bully their colleagues in the workplace, to bully their neighbours, to bully people in their communities. They are doing things that they would never do before. It has moved forward from the bullying in the schoolyard to this new type of bullying that affects adults and people of all ages. I wanted to clarify that.

Under the Criminal Code provisions, when and if someone goes to court, obviously the youth protection agencies and the court would look at it in terms of the age of the person it is applicable to, so nothing will be criminalizing young people in the bill.

Private Members' Business

The really terrible difference about cyberbullying is its anonymity. It allows people of all ages to bully each other and spread false messages, to carry out criminal harassment and to defame and libel people they know and talk to every day, but nobody would know it was them.

The problem about cyberbullying or this kind of bullying is that because it is done anonymously and because it is done on the Internet, it lasts forever. A person might be 95 or 102, and this messaging would be there about that person. A person may be moving to another country, but it will follow them wherever they go because of the nature of cyberspace. They can never escape it. There is no way they can run and hide.

I have some colleagues who talked about harm. The harm is real. My mother used to say, "Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can never harm you". I used to believe that, but that is no longer true.

We do not have to punch somebody, push them, shove them, do nuggies on them or do whatever we want to do anymore. We do not need to hurt somebody physically, because the emotional damage done by cyberbullying is so expansive, and it reaches everywhere, even after death, that people cannot escape it. That is why a lot of people resort to suicide as a result of cyberbullying. I can think of no outcome that is worse than someone committing suicide. This is a real issue, and I really wanted to speak to it.

A lot of people suggested that there are other areas within the Criminal Code that could apply to this issue. I want to assure everyone here that I have learned a lot listening to people speak in this House. There is no limit to what we can learn when we listen to other people's opinions.

If the bill goes to committee, I am prepared to be open to anything that will strengthen the bill and make it more effective and more relevant. I do not believe that as the House of Commons, as parliamentarians, we should abdicate our role and wait until the Senate has done something. We have a duty here to legislate. We are elected officials. I want us to deal with this here in this House and in this place.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for debate has expired.

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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to an order made Wednesday, May 30 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 6, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(7) the House will now proceed to the consideration of Motion No. 313 under private members' business.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNOR GENERAL

The House resumed from March 27 consideration of the motion.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the present time, the Governor General of Canada pays no income tax.

Under this motion, our Governor General would have to pay his taxes. For reasons of transparency, we agree with this motion, that is, that the Governor General should pay income tax.

Queen Elizabeth pays income tax. The Governor General of New Zealand pays income tax. Moreover, the Lieutenant Governors of all the provinces of Canada pay income tax. So why should the Governor General of Canada not pay income tax?

There is no reason why he should not pay taxes. He should pay taxes, just like the Queen, like Governors General in other countries and just like all Canadians.

There is a precedent for this. Before 2001, a portion of the salary of members of the House was not taxable. In 2001, for reasons of transparency, the Chrétien government canceled this non-taxable portion and increased members' salaries. This case is similar. It is not a good idea for part or all of the Governor General's salary not to be taxable.

However, I would like to add an important condition: the Governor General should not be punished. He began his term some time ago for a given salary, which he accepted. If he is now required to pay tax, the government should increase his gross salary so that his net salary is the same as before. This is more or less what was done for the members and it is what the government should do in the Governor General's case.

I know Governor General David Johnston quite well. In fact, he was my boss in the 1990s, when he was the principal of McGill University and I was the dean of the Faculty of Arts. I know he worked very hard as principal of McGill University and president of the University of Waterloo for some 30 years before becoming Governor General.

Private Members' Business

[English]

However, there is another important element here. Unknown I think to the mover of this motion, it turns out that the government is proposing to do something just like what I had said in the budget bill, and that is increasing the salary of the Governor General and making that larger salary taxable. However, the government is increasing the salary as if the Governor General paid the highest marginal rate. Therefore, some might say that he is getting a pay hike.

The reason I talked about his three decades at McGill and at Waterloo as president is to state with certainty that his income, other than Governor General income, must certainly be in excess of \$138,000. Therefore, the government is correct, and this is one rare occasion when I agree with it, that by increasing his salary by the amount that, it will indeed leave his after-tax salary unchanged.

Therefore, the Liberal Party agrees with the motion subject to the caveat that the pre-tax salary has to be raised. While we deplore the budget implementation bill for 1001 reasons, in this case we agree with the government.

• (1820)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a shame to think that the Bloc would use the privilege afforded by this place to play the same tired politics of division with Canadian unity and the very traditions we hold dear, but that is exactly what it does, time and time again.

Unlike the four remaining Bloc MPs opposite, I, for one, am proud of our country's heritage and I am sincerely disappointed that a member of the House would suggest that the Governor General is responsible for something he has no control over, for nothing else than cheap political gain. There is simply no question that this motion has nothing to do whatsoever with correcting an anachronism in the tax code, which our Conservative government has already done, but everything to do with attacking Canada's proud royal traditions in this, the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. That is why the government must oppose the motion.

It is no secret that the member opposite has deliberately timed the introduction of this debate to coincide with this momentous occasion. While Canadians view the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne as Queen of Canada, as a time to celebrate our country's rich tradition and impressive achievements, the Bloc never misses an opportunity to try to tear the country apart.

The true intent of the member's motion is apparent in his reaction to our government's Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal program. During this year's celebrations, 60,000 deserving Canadians will be recognized for significant achievements and outstanding service to their communities, while honouring Her Majesty for her service to Canada.

Instead of fulfilling their duties as members of Parliament to recognize the contributions of their constituents to Canada and their communities, the Bloc members have hijacked an important and worthy program instead for political grandstanding. Not only have all four Bloc MPs sent the medals back, denying their constituents recognition for their selfless and outstanding service, but the member opposite has gone so far as to call them a "monarchistic joke".

Unlike the separatist Bloc Quebecois, our Conservative government appreciates the monarchy's fundamental importance to our democratic history and tradition. As Canadians, this history and tradition defines and unites us.

That is why this year our government was proud to welcome His Highness, the Prince of Wales, to Canada this past month, to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's service to our country for the past 60 years, inspiring Canadians and bringing them closer together. For some, Her Majesty is the Crown. She is the only queen they have ever known.

That is why it is so important we mark this year, this milestone, in our history. It is not only a celebration of the Queen but also a celebration of what it means to be Canadian.

Despite the Bloc's red herring attempt to discredit our proud and united tradition of constitutional monarchy, I am happy to assure Canadians that our government has acted to ensure that the Governor General's salary is subject to tax in the same manner as the salary of all Canadians.

I should note that despite what is implied by today's motion, the Governor General had no say in the matter and could not have unilaterally corrected it. While it is true that the Governor General was for many years exempt from paying tax on income earned from the office, our government has acted quickly and fairly to correct this historic anachronism out of a sense of duty to the Canadian taxpayer and not as a thinly veiled attack on the Queen's representative in Canada.

We have already introduced legislation to end the income tax exemption for the Governor General's salary, which will subject it to tax in the same manner as the salary of every other Canadian. This measure will apply to the 2013 and subsequent taxation years.

This treatment is consistent with recent measures in other Commonwealth countries to make the salary of their governors general subject to income tax, such as Australia in 2001 and New Zealand in 2010. Indeed, the Queen herself has voluntarily paid tax on her private income in the United Kingdom since the early 1990s, setting an example for her representatives in Commonwealth countries around the world.

• (1825)

Since 2006, our government has been squarely focused on creating a tax system that fuels job creation and growth in the economy and allows Canadians to keep more of their hard earned money. Our tax system rewards Canadians for reaching their full potential and gives individuals and families the flexibility to make the choices that are right for them.

The words of Adrienne Clarkson, Canada's 26th Governor General, perfectly capture the fundamental relationship between taxes and indispensable government services to which all Canadians are entitled:

—I've always had the feeling whenever I hear people say they don't want to pay any income tax, I always wonder well, how do we get our medical care, or how do we get to the schools that we go to...How do we do all the things that we can do to make sure everybody gets their fair share? How can we do it? Well, income taxes do that.

While the former Liberal government did not fulfill Madam Clarkson's apparent desire to be taxed when she served as Governor General, I can assure her that our government would have done it.

Our Conservative government recognizes the fundamental importance of taxes, a responsibility and a benefit to be shared by all Canadians, and has rightly extended this duty to the Governor General.

I would remind members opposite that this side of the House flatly refuses to play politics with our Canadian democratic traditions. The Governor General plays a key role in promoting our national identity by supporting and promoting Canadian values of diversity, inclusion, culture and heritage, both at home and abroad. He or she encourages Canadians to build a compassionate society and work together to create strong and generous communities, fostering national unity.

It is abundantly clear why the separatist Bloc has chosen this, the year of the Diamond Jubilee, to launch this partisan attack on the Queen's representative in Canada. While our government has acted fairly to correct an outdated provision contained in the Income Tax Act, the Bloc wants nothing more from the motion than to gain media attention for its lamentable attempts to denigrate Canadian constitutional tradition, just like its refusal to honour outstanding achievements with the Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Members should not take my word for it. They just need to ask the deserving constituents from Richmond—Arthabaska, Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Ahuntsic and, most important, Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, whose service to their communities still goes unrecognized by their elected representatives.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the Royal Internet site about the Queen, it says:

As a constitutional monarch, The Queen abides by the decisions of the Canadian Government, but she continues to play important ceremonial and symbolic roles.

[*Translation*]

As for the Governor General's role, it is primarily representative. He represents both the Queen in Canada and Canadians abroad. If we define the Queen's role as symbolic and historical, the same is true for the Governor General.

Indeed, the Canadian political system is both a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. The powers of the Queen, and therefore of the Governor General, are thus limited not by tradition, but by the Constitution. Canada is a sovereign nation.

In short, regardless of our opinion on the issue, the Canadian monarchy bears first and foremost the mantle of this nation's traditions and history, rather than that of real executive powers. If we go back to the distant past—well, not so distant, in fact—when Canada was but a vulgar Dominion, it is understandable that it was inconceivable at the time to tax the Queen or her representatives. Not being sovereign, Canada could not have made this decision.

Members will agree that things have changed and that the government will not cause a diplomatic chill between the United Kingdom and Canada by taxing the Governor General's salary. I do not think that the Prime Minister has been threatened in any way by London after having revealed his intention to determine the

Private Members' Business

Governor General's salary in Bill C-38. Moreover, since 1993, the Queen herself has consented, quite voluntarily, to pay taxes.

The Prime Minister, especially since achieving his majority in the House, seems to have taken his admiration for royalty up a notch. Without putting words in his mouth, I believe that the Conservative party is afraid to be perceived as lacking respect for tradition and the institutions that forged this country. The monarchy will always be part of our history, whether we like it or not, but nothing is forcing us to perpetuate illogical and archaic traditions. In fact, I do not think that the transition to a sovereign nation could have been more respectful and peaceful, despite everything, than it actually was.

Basically, the Queen's representative is being asked to participate in this transition and to follow the example of the Queen, who has made a choice and is participating in a more equitable and fairer society by paying taxes. No one is above the law in this country. In any case, nobody should be. Behind the image of the welfare state and assistance and the development of a more egalitarian society, there is the law. No one is beyond its reach, and the Governor General should not be either. The Prime Minister has finally given in.

The New Democratic Party, like all progressive forces in Canada, believes in a fairer and more egalitarian society in which everyone can do their share. Without wishing to upset anyone, I believe that this government has already shown a great deal of respect by perpetuating the very existence of the position, which is also remunerated.

It must not be forgotten that of the 54 Commonwealth countries, only 16 continue to acknowledge the monarch as the head of state. Their citizens should not have to bear even the slightest additional burden to allow the head of state to shirk her or his civic duty with impunity. Yes, I consider that a shirking of responsibility. I come from a union background and know it well. As a political party that supports workers, the NDP will never come out against people fighting for and succeeding in obtaining better working conditions.

In a context in which everyone needs to tighten their belt and where for many there is not much left of the belt to tighten, altering the Governor General's salary so that there is no net impact as a result of paying taxes shows a lack of respect for all workers and unemployed people who are victims of this budget's austerity measures.

If this government were to increase personal income tax one day, would the Treasury Board increase the salaries of public servants so that they would not have to bear the burden of the increase? Of course not. Similarly, it would not exempt them from an income tax increase if a salary increase meant they would have to pay more taxes. This would be illogical and run counter to the very principle of taxation.

In particular, it runs counter to the principle of equity, which requires those who are better off to pay a little more to enable everyone to have access to public services. Why should the Governor General be entitled to more favourable treatment at a time when this government is planning to dismiss 19,000 people and penalize I don't know how many thousands of others through its employment insurance, pension plan and old age security measures?

Private Members' Business

The concept of equity is very important because it underpins the fundamental principle of every progressive society, in which those whose level of economic well-being is identical are treated identically under the taxation system.

●(1830)

Similarly, of course, those who are at different levels economically will not be treated identically from the taxation standpoint. Taxation is the principal way in which governments can collect income and redistribute it. From this standpoint, it remains the strategic key to achieving equity in Canada and in many other progressive democratic countries.

So the New Democratic Party is not criticizing the salary increase as such, but rather the fact that the measures proposed in Bill C-38, the budget implementation bill, do not observe the principle of equity to which all other citizens are subject.

And now, I would like to conclude by speaking about the impact of Bill C-38, which we are currently considering, and which I have currently been studying as a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. In connection with this, the specific provision concerning the Governor General's salary does raise a problem.

We tried to propose a significant amendment that would fix the Governor General's salary at a certain level. The amendment in the government bill to the provision dealing with the Governor General's salary actually brings his salary up, presumably so as to keep it at the same level. We do not agree with the arguments that the Governor General's salary is not going to go up with this bill. Actually, if we quickly do the math, we can anticipate seeing a real increase in the Governor General's salary. Moreover, there are currently other provisions that favour the Governor General. He is exempted from paying sales tax, the harmonized tax in most provinces across the country. Currently, the Governor General, who should really be a citizen like everyone else, who holds an honorary position, who represents the Queen in our constitutional monarchy and democracy, receives special treatment compared to everyone else, treatment that even the Queen does not get in the United Kingdom.

We feel that, if we have to deal with this issue, we should not do so under the radar, allowing the Governor General to get more favours than he used to have. We have to set conditions that will make it possible to go back to the way the position and salary were before.

That is why we introduced an amendment fixing the Governor General's salary at exactly what he earned previously. Our amendment was defeated.

In this sense, we are currently following the example of Australia and New Zealand in taxing the Governor General's income, but granting him an increase relative to what he presently earns. Of course, we must also consider the fact that the Governor General will also have sources of income that are not generally considered part of the salary. It may be investment income, accommodation allowances and so on. That must be taken into consideration.

However, the position, as important as it may be in a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy like ours, remains an honorary one. We have a good example of that, I feel, with the famous episode in 2008 when we went through what some

might consider a political crisis in this country. The Governor General at the time received advice that she could have opposed the government's attempt at prorogation, but she chose not to do so, simply because her position is recognized first and foremost as honorary, with no executive power attached to it at all.

In that sense, I think that the Governor General's salary prior to the amendment proposed in Bill C-38 was quite appropriate given his responsibilities. His position is honorific and comes with many benefits, including the respect that other countries and our international partners pay when he travels as the country's representative, which is a reward in itself.

The government's proposal in Bill C-38 seems out of step with reality. Bill C-38 does not provide for a specific salary, but offers the Governor General a salary which will determine his or her income tax rate. This will give him pay raises that we consider unacceptable given that thousands of workers are being told to tighten their belts, and the federal government has announced plans to fire or lay off over 19,000 people across the country. Many organizations have suggested that number could be as high as 30,000.

●(1835)

In that sense, we understand the motion that was put forward and we support the spirit of the motion. We would have liked to see the government get on board with the proposed amendment to Bill C-38, but that did not happen.

●(1840)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Motion M-313 simply makes sense. Every spring, Canadians prepare their tax returns and it is time that the head of our state also paid his taxes. We are far from the days when people believed in the divinity of the representative of the Crown. This outdated idea is why the salary of the representative of the Crown was not taxable.

This is the 21st century and even Queen Elizabeth II and her family pay their taxes in England. We are in an embarrassing situation. England, the origin of our constitutional monarchy, is more advanced than we are. It is simply a question of fairness.

The Dalai Lama visited Canada a few weeks ago. I refer to him because he is a good example of someone who, in the past, was chosen by divine right, which is justification for an undemocratic power, for he is chosen by God. At the same time, he was the leader of the Tibetan nation. He left that post, because he believed in the idea of a secular state. I recall him saying, "I am simply a monk".

I believe that the Governor General is simply a Canadian citizen and that he should pay his taxes like everyone else.

At a time when the Minister of Finance and the minister responsible for the treasury are asking Canadians to tighten their belts, they should ask the Governor General to do the same. This would send Canadians the message that they are promoting a more progressive tax system, and this motion is a step in the right direction.

Private Members' Business

All the lieutenant governors' salaries are taxable, so why not the Governor General's? The other Commonwealth governors general, in New Zealand and Australia, are subject to income tax; so why not ours?

One of my constituents has something to say about this. I would like to read his email. Lucien Martel from Saint-Zotique says:

In today's news, we were reminded that Canada's lieutenant governors pay tax on their income. But to help them pay their taxes, the government has apparently doubled their salaries... If that's the case, that is another reason among so many others ruining our government's reputation.

In other words, when Canadians see that the members of Parliament and the Government of Canada are spending taxpayers' money like drunken sailors, they lose respect for the government, and their trust in the government here in Ottawa drops significantly.

Let me remind the government that its job is to defend the public interest, not the interests of the elite. If they forget that, we will be there to replace them in 2015; that is a fact. They would be better off supporting this motion and starting to regain the trust of Canadians.

I strongly urge the government to support this motion. Yes, this motion was moved by a party that supports Quebec sovereignty. However, we must show equality to all Canadians. We must explain to Quebecers, who may not always venerate symbols such as Queen Elizabeth, that all Canadians are subject to the same tax system, that this is a progressive country and we are moving forward. We are not stuck in the past, stuck on our heritage, on this idea of the divine right. This is the 21st century and we must move forward progressively. This means that the Governor General must pay taxes.

I do not understand how, at a time when budget restrictions are being placed on a number of groups and organizations, when there are threats of cuts to environmental groups and women's groups, among others, the Governor General's right to not pay taxes is protected. It makes no sense.

●(1845)

[English]

I think we have to move forward in this country, not by protecting these old symbols financially by saying, "Governor General, you know what? Your position is honorific. It's descendant from this idea of the divine right of kings. Therefore, you shouldn't have to pay taxes".

We are in the 21st century, and we have to advance into the 21st century by applying equitable rules to everyone. I do not see why the Governor General should not pay taxes. I have not heard a compelling argument from the government. That is not something rare; I rarely hear compelling arguments from it. I usually hear the talking points, which on this issue are that the opposition is not proud of the heritage of Canada, and it is attacking the hon. Governor General, the head of our state.

It is not about that at all. It is really about showing Canadians this idea of fairness. The greatest heritage of our country is this idea of fairness. Daily, from hearing the government speak, I can see why many Canadians from all provinces would lose their faith in the governing class because of this cheapening of the idea of fairness. By saying to the Governor General "You do not have to pay taxes,

but everyone else does have to pay taxes", it is really eroding this idea of fairness that exists in our nation's fabric.

I would hope that the government looks at this, not in terms of the divisive way the government member spoke about before, where she said this is typical and we are trying to promote a sovereignist agenda. I have given my discourse in both official languages, and I believe in the strength of our nation through the existence of both official languages, through discussions among all the founding nations of this country. I do not buy this argument that this is dividing Canada, making it Canada versus the province of Quebec. I do not buy that at all.

There are two parties in this House that would like that to be the narrative of this motion. Personally, I do not agree. The idea behind this motion is good. The Governor General should be treated be like an ordinary Canadian, like any other Canadian, paying his taxes.

I do not want to denigrate the reputation of our present Governor General. He has contributed fantastically to his community. He has given so much to the academic community that the government is currently attacking by cutting funding to science and research. It denigrates that community that our Governor General promoted for so long.

I do not want to give the impression that I am attacking the person of the Governor General, but in terms of the symbolic position, I believe it would send a good message to Canadians if next spring the Governor General filled out his tax forms and sent them in, like anyone else. It just makes sense.

Every MP in this chamber does the same thing. They file their taxes, as do all Canadians. Some do it later than others, and there are penalties and whatnot. We have a system in place. I do not see the logic in the Governor General position being outside of that rubric, that progressive fiscal regime.

I spoke a bit about the Governor General as a symbol and the Governor General as a person. I do want to drive home the point that I do not want to attack the person who is the Governor General. I think he has contributed excellently to his community. As McGill is my alma mater, I am proud of the time he was at McGill. We were not there at the same time, of course, since I am much younger. He had moved on at that point.

I am often conscious of all the contributions he has made to his community. I certainly would not want him to feel attacked as a person.

●(1850)

However, I think even the Governor General would agree that perhaps it is time for us to move into the 21st century and make the salary of the Governor General taxable just like that of all other Canadians. It is a question of fairness and equity.

I do hope the government will not see this as divisive, pitting Quebec against Canada, but will rather see the progressive nature of this motion and make the Governor General's salary taxable.

Private Members' Business

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I request your co-operation to give me a few seconds at the end of my speech to table an amendment.

First, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour for presenting this motion to the House.

Earlier, a Conservative member accused the Bloc Québécois of being a separatist and sovereignist party—a fact known by all members in this House—and of having taken advantage of Queen Elizabeth's diamond jubilee to sneakily propose that the Governor General pay taxes.

In my opinion, the Bloc did not choose to do so this year. An election was held about a year ago and when the time came to introduce bills, the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour felt it would be a good idea if the only Canadian who is not paying taxes did like everyone else and began paying taxes. In fact, many parliamentarians in this House supported the idea.

Even government members—who belong to the party of the member who spoke earlier—included my colleague's suggestion in the budget, after he proposed that the Governor General pay taxes. That recommendation was followed by the government so that the Governor General would do like everyone else, like all workers in Canada and in Quebec, and began paying taxes at last. Not everyone knew that. Again, I congratulate the hon. member for presenting this motion.

At public events taking place on weekends in our ridings, many people were surprised to learn that the Governor General, in addition to holding an honorary position and collecting a good salary and a pension for life, did not pay taxes, which is totally unfair. There is no other way of putting it. That situation will be corrected in the budget.

Of course, the Conservative government did not stop there. After all, we are used to its poison pills. This time, it increased the Governor General's salary. In fact, it doubled that salary, something which a Liberal member justified a little earlier.

The former leader of the Liberal Party of Canada had also suggested increasing the Governor General's salary because taxes would henceforth have to be paid. I know of no employer who, after having seen an employee's taxes increase even slightly, took pity on the employee and offered a salary increase.

Worse still, the government doubled the Governor General's salary, which is completely out of line. It can in no way be considered normal to do so. To tell people in the budget that the Governor General's salary will be taxed and then to increase that salary from \$135,000 to \$270,000, which few people in Canada or Quebec earn, amounts to laughing at people.

The member criticized the Bloc Québécois for having chosen this particular moment, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, for moving such a motion. I, on the contrary, think that it is a good time to think about the fact that the monarchy is archaic. Although this is 2012, the monarchy still governs the way we live in Canada and Quebec.

The Queen is the Queen of Canada, but in my view, no one today thinks that she serves any purpose whatsoever. However, some may

believe that she does. In Quebec, however, the survey was very clear. According to this survey, over 70% of people think that we should simply get rid of the monarchy—with all due respect.

The history is there. My father teaches history. I think it is obvious that at a certain time, the queens and kings had a role to play, but today, with the parliamentary system and democracy, the role performed by these people could very well be replaced—because it seems to be strictly ceremonial—by a role that could be played by Parliament. For example, the Speaker of the House of Commons could very well give assent to bills. If the Senate—which the Bloc could well do without—is still there, then the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons could give final assent to any bill democratically passed by parliamentarians elected legitimately and democratically by the people.

What useful role does the Governor General in fact perform? At the moment, apart from rubber stamping and making a few appearances, the Governor General costs us a great deal, it has to be said. It is not only the Governor General who is expensive, but everything concerning the monarchy, including of course the lieutenant-governors of each province. In Quebec, we had one who cost us dearly.

● (1855)

It is perhaps being settled in court. It is unfortunate, because she could have had a more honourable career had it not been for the allegations made against her. One thing is certain: our current system of government is absolutely archaic.

Moreover, since winning a majority, the Conservative government has gone practically crazy over the monarchy. The Canadian armed forces are once again the royal forces, and their uniforms and names have had to be changed. A stained glass window has also been made to honour Queen Victoria. There has been frenzied spending to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. For example, money has been spent on medals. CBC took advantage of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee to give us information on what this is costing taxpayers. We learned a few days ago on a CBC program, that the monarchy costs us more than it actually does the English. Indeed, the monarchy costs approximately \$1.50 per person here in Canada, and only \$.93 per person in England. That is quite absurd.

In other former colonies, such as Australia, they also decided to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee this year, but not with as much pomp, and especially not with the same level of spending as here. I believe that the contradiction between this inappropriate spending and the cutbacks announced by the government was also raised in this House. In the same budget where it was announced that the Governor General would finally be taxed—thanks to my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, who quite fairly raised this relevant issue—it was announced that not only would his salary be doubled, there would be a multitude of cuts, including those to the famous employment insurance system.

The unemployed are being told that their pay will be cut by 30%, that they will have to accept lower-paying jobs and that they will have to spend more on gas to get around. Indeed, they will have to work an hour or more from their homes, and they may even have to relocate from one region to another. At the same time, the government is acting like it has a lot of money, like it is rolling in it, like it can throw parties and continue to live with a system that is now obsolete. I am not ashamed to say that I feel this way, and I am not the only one; many people share this opinion. I hear people say this very often.

There is no need to be disloyal to the Queen of England. We can show her respect, and that is what we are doing. For example, this week, we chose not to block or interrupt MPs' messages on the occasion of her diamond jubilee, but at the same time, we told everyone that we are not jubilant and that we do not need a monarchy in Canada.

My colleague's motion was moved before the budget was tabled. That is why it was straightforward. All he wanted was for the only non-taxable salary in Canada to be taxed. The government took his advice and included the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour's proposal to tax the Governor General's salary in the budget, but it also included the following poison pill: the Governor General's salary will go up from \$135,000 to \$270,000, a two-fold increase.

I would therefore like to propose an amendment, seconded by my colleague from Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

I propose adding the following words to the end of the my colleague's motion concerning the Governor General's salary:

without increasing his salary

I think that would deal with the government's attempts to thumb its nose at the people.

•(1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The amendment to motion M-313 would add the words “without increasing his salary” at the end. The amendment is in order.

It is therefore my duty to inform hon. members that, pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent.

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour if he consents to the amendment being moved.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): I agree with the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member consents to the amendment being moved. We now resume debate on the amendment.

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

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in this debate on the motion made by my hon. colleague. It must be understood that the only Canadian citizen who paid no taxes, the

Private Members' Business

Governor General, must be subject to the same rules of fairness that apply to all Canadians.

In that regard, and in a spirit of fairness, the motion made by the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour makes sense both for parliamentarians and for the public.

The amendment that my colleague, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska, has just proposed logically blends this desire to tax the Governor General with the addition that his salary will not be increased. That is to say, he will maintain the same income that he had before. If we make an amendment that makes the Governor General's salary taxable and then we double that salary, there is no effect. The fact of adding an amendment that maintains the spirit of the motion introduced by the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour allows us to keep the essence of the motion as originally moved, given that, in the budget, the government has doubled the salary.

•(1905)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate.

There being no other members rising for debate, the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour may use his right of reply.

The hon. member has five minutes to conclude the debate on this issue.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to conclude this two-hour debate in which we were simply asking that the only person living in Canada who was not paying taxes began doing so like everyone else.

NDP and Liberal members said it is only normal that all citizens pay taxes. I was very pleased to learn that, in the last budget, the government followed up on this proposal and decided to make the Governor General pay taxes like everyone living in Canada, like the Queen and like all the other Governors Generals in the Commonwealth.

However, a few days later I was shocked when the government said that since the Governor General was going to pay taxes, it would double his salary. As my colleague pointed out earlier, to bring the Governor General's salary from \$137,000 to \$270,000 is a salary increase. He used to earn \$135,000 net and now he will make about \$150,000 net. Therefore, his salary has increased.

Moreover, his pension was taxable. When he was earning \$135,000, he would later collect a pension of about \$95,000 or \$97,000 for the rest of his life, this after only five years of service. Now, he will collect \$150,000 for the rest of his life. All this for just five years in office. It does not make any sense.

Does anyone know a worker in Canada who works five years and then collects a pension equal to 100% of his salary? It does not exist anywhere. Yet, that is the case with the Governor General. The government decided to make him pay taxes. However, by doubling his salary it has increased his annual pension by about \$50,000. That just does not make any sense.

Private Members' Business

I am surprised that we have so much money to spend on a person who holds an honorary position, when the government is cutting benefits for the unemployed, when it is about to cut old age pensions for people who often live below the poverty line, and when it is slashing funding for environmental organizations and women's groups.

However, I am very pleased that my colleague tabled an amendment that adds meaning to this motion, since that amendment provides that the salary must remain the same. The Governor General must pay taxes on his current salary.

I wished that while debating this motion, we would also reflect on the relevancy of the honorary and archaic position of Governor General, which is a symbol of monarchy that is totally out of place in a democratic society. Monarchy and democracy do not go together. These two terms are totally opposed.

As the hon. member suggested earlier, for royal assent, we could have a letter from the Speaker of the House and a letter from the Speaker of the Senate confirming that there was a majority vote on the bill. In that way, the bill would be enacted, and we would not have to wait for the signature of the Governor General, a symbolic and archaic gesture.

The government is trying to make cuts right and left. Well, ladies and gentlemen, this is a perfect spot for cuts. You could cut tens of millions of dollars in spending right there instead of attacking the unemployed, seniors and non-profit organizations.

The Governor General costs us \$60 million, almost the salary of 300 hon. members for one person. The Senate costs \$45 million in total, with the expenses of all 104 senators.

Let me conclude by saying that we have to really think about the Governor General's role. I would also say to the members opposite that I am a Quebecker, that I am proud of it and that I have my Quebec symbols. Are they proud to be Canadian? If so, then why do they not have Canadian symbols instead of symbols of the monarchy, a vestige of colonialism?

• (1910)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for private members' business has expired. The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it. I declare the amendment defeated.

(Amendment negatived)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is now on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to an order made on Wednesday, May 30, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 6, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

[For continuation of proceedings see part B]

CONTENTS

Tuesday, June 5, 2012

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

The Speaker 8811

Combating Terrorism Act

Mr. O'Connor (for the Minister of Justice) 8811

Bill S-7. First reading 8811

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time) 8811

Petitions

Employment

Mr. Mulcair 8811

The Environment

Mr. Mulcair 8811

Human Trafficking

Mrs. O'Neill Gordon 8811

Air Canada

Mr. Lamoureux 8812

Wine Industry

Mr. Cannan 8812

Pensions

Ms. Murray 8812

Abortion

Mr. Kamp 8812

Shark Finning

Ms. May 8812

The Environment

Ms. May 8812

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski 8812

Questions Passed as Orders for Returns

Mr. Lukiwski 8813

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Scientific and Social Science

Expertise

Mr. Stewart 8815

Motion 8815

Mr. Goodyear 8816

Mr. Hsu 8816

Mrs. Groguhé 8817

Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) 8817

Mr. Goodyear 8818

Mr. Hyer 8818

Mr. Larose 8818

Mr. Goodyear 8819

Mr. Stewart 8821

Mr. Hsu 8822

Mr. Hyer 8822

Mr. Sweet 8822

Mr. Hsu 8823

Mr. Stewart 8826

Mr. Goodyear 8826

Mr. Lamoureux 8826

Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) 8827

Mr. Wallace 8827

Ms. Liu 8827

Mr. Goodyear 8829

Mr. Hsu 8829

Mrs. Groguhé 8829

Mr. Chisholm 8829

Mr. Goodyear 8830

Mr. Hsu 8831

Mr. Lake 8831

Mr. Hsu 8832

Mr. Rousseau 8833

Mr. Kamp 8833

Mr. Hsu 8834

Mr. Chisholm 8835

Mr. Masse 8835

Mr. Trottier 8837

Ms. Fry 8837

Mrs. Groguhé 8837

Mr. Hyer 8837

Mr. Cleary 8837

Ms. Rempel 8839

Ms. Fry 8839

Ms. Nash 8839

Ms. Rempel 8840

Mr. Giguère 8841

Mr. Hsu 8842

Mr. Warawa 8842

Mr. Braid 8842

Ms. Freeman 8843

Mr. Hyer 8844

Mr. Valeriote 8844

Mr. Harris (Scarborough Southwest) 8844

Mr. Hsu 8846

Mr. Dubé 8846

Mrs. Day 8846

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

“MP for a Day” Competition

Mr. Bellavance 8846

Erin Doyle

Mrs. McLeod 8847

Festivals in Vaudreuil-Soulanges

Mr. Nicholls 8847

Citizenship Act

Mr. Shory 8847

World Oceans

Ms. Murray 8847

D-Day	
Mr. Schellenberger	8847
World Environment Day	
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	8848
George Abdallah	
Mrs. Gallant	8848
ALS Awareness Month	
Mr. Tilson	8848
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. Laverdière	8848
Budget Implementation	
Mr. Gourde	8849
Health	
Mr. Stoffer	8849
Rodolfo Quezada Toruno	
Mr. Hoback	8849
Rugby	
Mr. Pacetti	8849
The Budget	
Mr. Anderson	8850
D-Day	
Mr. Sullivan	8850
Natural Resources	
Mr. Calkins	8850

ORAL QUESTIONS

National Defence	
Mr. Cullen	8850
Mr. Kenney	8850
Mr. Cullen	8850
Mr. Kenney	8851
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	8851
Mr. Fantino	8851
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	8851
Mr. Fantino	8851
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	8851
Mr. Fantino	8851
Employment	
Mr. Rae	8851
Ms. Finley	8851
Mr. Rae	8851
Mr. Kenney	8852
Mr. Rae	8852
Mr. Kenney	8852
Ministerial Expenditures	
Mr. Boulerice	8852
Mr. Van Loan	8852
Mr. Boulerice	8852
Mr. Van Loan	8852
Mr. Angus	8852
Mr. Van Loan	8852
Mr. Angus	8853

Mr. Van Loan	8853
Mr. Ravignat	8853
Mr. Van Loan	8853
Mr. Ravignat	8853
Mr. Van Loan	8853
Citizenship and Immigration	
Ms. Sims	8853
Mr. Kenney	8853
Ms. Sims	8854
Mr. Kenney	8854
Mrs. Groguhé	8854
Mr. Kenney	8854
International Trade	
Mr. Regan	8854
Mr. Keddy	8854
Citizenship and Immigration	
Ms. Foote	8854
Mr. Kenney	8854
Search and Rescue	
Mr. McKay	8855
Mr. Fantino	8855
The Budget	
Ms. Chow	8855
Mr. Lebel	8855
Mr. Aubin	8855
Mr. Lebel	8855
Pensions	
Ms. Mathysen	8855
Mr. Menzies	8855
Ms. Mathysen	8855
Mr. Menzies	8856
Justice	
Mr. Brown (Barrie)	8856
Mr. Nicholson	8856
National Film Board	
Mr. Nantel	8856
Mr. Calandra	8856
Mr. Cash	8856
Mr. Calandra	8856
Veterans	
Mr. Chicoine	8857
Mr. Blaney	8857
Mr. Stoffer	8857
Mr. Blaney	8857
The Environment	
Mr. Scarpaleggia	8857
Mr. Kent	8857
Mr. Scarpaleggia	8857
Mr. Kent	8857
Agriculture	
Mr. Allen (Welland)	8858
Mr. Ritz	8858
Mr. Atamanenko	8858

Mr. Ritz	8858	Mr. Stewart	8866
The Economy		Mr. Hsu	8866
Mr. Van Kesteren	8858	Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	8867
Mr. Flaherty	8858	Mr. Nantel	8868
The Environment		Mr. Hsu	8869
Ms. Bennett	8858	Mr. Albrecht	8869
Mr. Kent	8858	Mr. Saganash	8869
Ms. Quach	8858	Mr. Toone	8870
Mr. Kent	8859	Mr. Hsu	8871
Natural Resources		Mr. Benskin	8871
Mr. Zimmer	8859	Mr. Nicholls	8871
Mr. Oliver	8859	Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	8872
Air Transportation		Mr. Toone	8873
Ms. Michaud	8859	Mr. Hsu	8873
Mr. Lebel	8859	Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	8874
Fisheries and Oceans		Ms. Bennett	8874
Ms. May	8859	Mr. Martin	8875
Mr. Ashfield	8859	Mr. Hsu	8876
Points of Order		Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	8876
Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics		Division deemed demanded and deferred	8877
Mr. Del Mastro	8860		
Privilege		PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS	
Access to Information		Criminal Code	
Mr. Bélanger	8860	Bill C-273. Second reading	8878
Syria		Mr. Choquette	8878
Mr. Dewar	8860	Mr. Regan	8878
Motion	8860	Mr. Moore (Fundy Royal)	8879
(Motion agreed to)	8861	Mr. Genest-Jourdain	8880
Business of the House		Ms. Quach	8882
Ms. Turmel	8861	Mr. Lamoureux	8883
Motion	8861	Mr. Stewart	8884
(Motion agreed to)	8861	Ms. Fry	8884
		Division on motion deferred	8885
GOVERNMENT ORDERS		Governor General	
BUSINESS OF SUPPLY		Motion	8885
Opposition Motion—Scientific and social science expertise		Mr. McCallum	8885
Motion	8861	Mrs. Block	8886
Ms. Freeman	8861	Mr. Caron	8887
Ms. Borg	8862	Mr. Nicholls	8888
Mr. Lamoureux	8862	Mr. Bellavance	8890
Mr. Calandra	8863	Amendment	8891
Ms. Borg	8865	Mr. Plamondon	8891
Mr. Simms	8866	Mr. Fortin	8891
		Mr. Plamondon	8891
		(Amendment negated)	8892
		Division on Motion deferred	8892

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 5, 2012
(Part B)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 5, 2012

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1910)
[English]

SITUATION IN SYRIA

No. 14, Ms. Denise Savoie in the chair)

"4?> (House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 14, Ms. Denise Savoie in the chair)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That this Committee take note of the ongoing violence in Syria.

The Chair: I would like to remind hon. members of how the proceedings will unfold.

Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. Pursuant to the order adopted Friday, June 1, members may divide their time with another member. The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak. Pursuant to the special order, the Chair will receive no dilatory motions for quorum calls. We will now begin tonight's take note debate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs

•(1915)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Chair, the situation in Syria grows more desperate with every passing day and the list of Bashar al-Assad's victims grows even longer. The recent massacre in Houla, where 49 children were murdered, makes it agonizingly clear just how far Assad is willing to go in order to deny his people their legitimate democratic rights. He is willing to cling to power regardless of the cost to Syria or the Syrian people.

Our government has repeatedly condemned the savagery of the Assad regime and will continue to support the Syrian people in their struggle. Just last week, we expelled all remaining Syrian diplomats to protest the Houla massacre, coordinating this measure with several of our closest allies. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs said at the time, "Canada and our partners are speaking loudly, with one voice, in saying these Syrian representatives are not welcome in our countries while their masters in Damascus continue to perpetrate their heinous and murderous acts".

The Assad regime's brutal campaign of oppression has created a humanitarian emergency and has witnessed the systematic violation of human rights. It has had profound negative consequences for regional stability and has provoked a strong and wide-ranging response from the international community, including the development of the peace plan by UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan and the deployment of UN observers to monitor its implementation.

The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. More than 9,000 Syrians have been killed during the past year and tens of thousands have been displaced, including more than 70,000 refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Over one million Syrians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and our government has acted by providing up to \$7.5 million in humanitarian assistance that will help provide Syrians with emergency food assistance, safe water, sanitation facilities, essential household items and other much needed assistance.

The Houla massacre is only the latest in a lengthy list of gross human rights violations carried out by the Assad regime since the beginning of the crisis in March 2011. The list is long and varied, including restricted media access, denial of the right to peaceful assembly, the use of force against unarmed demonstrators, military assaults on civilian areas, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, summary executions, denial of medical treatment, torture and sexual violence, including against children.

These atrocities are so widespread that the commission of inquiry established by the UN Human Rights Council reports that the Syrian regime is responsible for crimes against humanity. The human rights situation is so dire that the Human Rights Council has held four emergency sessions on Syria, most recently on June 1. Canada participated actively in this session, co-sponsoring the resolution that condemned the Houla massacre and the ongoing human rights abuses being carried out by the regime.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs has stated, "we have a solemn duty to defend the vulnerable, to challenge the aggressor, to protect and promote human rights and human dignity at home and abroad".

While Canada wholeheartedly condemns the actions of the Assad regime, we must also be diligent in standing up for Syria's religious minorities and ensure that their rights are respected in Syria's present and its future. It is vital that Christian communities and others are not subject to prosecution or violence. Rest assured, Canada will be watching.

Government Orders

As damaging as Assad's oppressive policies have been for Syria, they may be even more destructive to regional stability. I have already highlighted the refugee situation caused by the crisis, which is placing a significant burden on countries, like Jordan, that have only limited resources with which to support these new arrivals. The conflict also risks inflaming sectarian and political tensions in neighbouring countries, most notably Lebanon where we have already seen the violence from Syria start to spill over into struggles between pro and anti-Assad Lebanese factions. Syria's Iranian ally has been quick to supply Assad with the tools and resources it needs to suppress its own popular protests for democratic change, even at the risk of turning the conflict into a regional proxy war.

The increased chaos and heightened sectarianism that will result only serves to provide terrorist organizations, like al-Qaeda, with opportunities to thrive and carry out further attacks against innocent civilians. Therefore, the international community must work together to end the Syrian crisis as quickly as possible.

We continue to believe that the best hope for doing so is Kofi Annan's peace plan, which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council and the Arab League. This plan calls for an immediate ceasefire in order to pave the way for a Syrian-led negotiated political transition.

● (1920)

Implementation of the plan is being observed by the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria. UN observers provide an unbiased and on-the-ground assessment of what is actually happening in Syria, ensuring that the regime is held to account for the abuses that it is committing. The Syrian government has accepted the Annan peace plan but, sadly, has refused to abide by its commitments, as seen all too tragically in that the UNSMIS has been able to confirm Assad's responsibility for this massacre.

Canada strongly supports the Annan peace plan and works with UNAMIS. We have contributed \$250,000 to Kofi Annan's mission and call on all parties, particularly the Assad regime, to immediately and fully implement all aspects of the plan, most importantly the ceasefire. The international community has made its support of the Annan plan inescapably clear and, in light of Assad's continued refusal to fulfill his commitments to Special Envoy Annan, we urge the UN Security Council to adopt binding international sanctions against the Assad regime in order to increase the pressure on Assad to immediately stop the violence. We call on those countries with influence in Damascus to encourage Assad to implement the Annan plan while he still has a chance to do so.

Our support for the Annan plan has been the key element of our response to the crisis in Syria, but it is far from the only one. Canada has repeatedly condemned the Assad regime, including the Prime Minister's call for Assad to step down in August 2011. In addition to expelling Syrian diplomats, Canada has imposed eight rounds of sanctions against Assad and his supporters. In addition to our humanitarian assistance, Canada has also committed up to \$1 million in non-lethal support for peaceful, pro-democracy actors in Syria.

On the international stage, Canada has been an active participant in efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis, both through established venues, such as the G8 and the United Nations, as well as through new groupings, such as the Friends of the Syrian People.

Regardless of the venue, however, we have already made it clear that Canada supports the Syrian people in their struggle for democracy. We have stood with them throughout the crisis and we will continue to stand with them in the future.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for raising the whole concern about freedom of religion. I know that the member for Mississauga—Erindale, who will also be speaking, has been involved with that, as has our Minister of Foreign Affairs.

We have some Canadian investment, mainly in the oil sector in Syria, so we do have a connection there. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary, with his vast experience in dealing with foreign governments and countries, could tell us what exactly Canada can do. One thing about Assad, as vicious as he may have been, there was still a certain degree of religious freedom. It was not perfect but there are other places in the area that were much worse. I personally have a real concern that we can go from bad to worse when we deal with some of those values, such as religious freedom.

Whereas our government has said that this is a big issue for Canada around the world, is it working through the UN? Are there certain things we can do in the formation of a new governance model? What can we do here to assure that the next regime does recognize many of the important human rights and values we have but specifically freedom of religion?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Chair, I thank the member for Crowfoot, my friend and my member of Parliament as well, for raising such an important issue about religious minorities.

While Assad may have been a friend of the religious minorities, and I am saying "may have", the fact remains clear that Assad has blood on his hands and he has to go. As he leaves, this causes a big concern for us. During my recent visit to Istanbul where I met with the members of the Syrian National Council, I made it very clear that we would not replace one dictatorial regime with another one that would not respect religious freedom. This was made very clear to them and we will make it very clear to those actors who are trying to promote democracy and will eventually rule Syria.

As far as Canada is concerned, we have established the Office of Religious Freedom, which my colleague from Mississauga is also looking after with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This office will keep a vigilant eye on what is happening to religious minorities in Syria as well as everywhere else in the world. Therefore, I can assure members that Canada will be keeping a very vigilant eye on the situation for minority religious rights in Syria.

● (1925)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, enumerated a number of actions that the government has taken. He knows that many of us had asked that the government to act sooner rather than later, specifically on the issue of sending the Syrian diplomats home.

I am just curious as to why it took the government this long to take that action. As he will know, many were calling on the government to do this but it waited. We knew what was going on since last March. It has been a year. Many of us have been calling for this for many months.

Government Orders

I am just curious as to why the government took so long.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Chair, the member raising this question has raised it with me on many occasions during debates we have had.

However, we were looking to the regional players at the United Nations to act. After the United Nations and the Arab League appointed Kofi Annan, we thought that, under pressure from Kofi Annan, Assad would come to his senses and begin, to which he agreed, a ceasefire. There was the hope that he was giving to the world community that he would abide by the resolution, by the peace plan put forward by the Special Envoy Kofi Annan.

Regretfully, as we can see now, specifically after the massacre that took place in Houla, we know that he was not adhering to that peace plan. Therefore, we had to take stronger actions in coordination with all the other allies.

It is important to note that it is important that we act in cooperation with other countries. Therefore, along with other countries, we expelled the diplomats from Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Madam Chair, could the parliamentary secretary tell us how many Canadians are still in Syria and what types of consular services Canada provides to its citizens?

How is our government helping Canadians who are still in Syria?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Chair, we do know that there are Canadian citizens in Syria and we are concerned about them.

I will take that question under advisement and will come back to the member with the answer of how many Canadian Syrians who registered with the embassy before we closed it are still in Syria. Our offices in Jordan, in Turkey and in Lebanon are ensuring that those Canadians are looked after. They are getting consular services from these missions surrounding Syria.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to turn again to Canada's diplomatic role in the world.

Could the parliamentary secretary briefly tell us how our role has changed since October 2010, when Canada lost its seat on the UN Security Council?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Chair, whether we have a seat on the Security Council or not, Canada has a very loud voice in the United Nations through its activities and our mission at the United Nations.

I would challenge the member and say that we are very heavily engaged through all venues in the decision making process at the United Nations. The member must remember that only 15 countries are on the United Nations Security Council out of the 194 at the United Nations. That does not mean that 194 countries do not have a say at the United Nations because they do not have a Security Council seat. That question of being there or not being there is not

the issue. The issue is that we have a very strong voice. We led the session at the UN human rights, co-sponsored, to bring in the resolution against Syria. We co-sponsored the resolution to condemn the human rights abuses in Iran.

We are fully engaged with the United Nations, whether we are on the Security Council or not.

• (1930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Madam Chair, I have a question. I would like the hon. member to answer it, if he can.

Last spring, when the crisis began, we learned that it was a large Canadian corporation that was producing the electricity and managing the energy supply in Syria. That is rather significant. A type of economic and technical support was being provided to Syria.

Would it not have been appropriate to prevent that company from supplying Syria? Would that not have topple the regime?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, on of the issue of the company providing electricity, from our point of view electricity was being provided to the people of Syria, not only to the Assad regime. It is important to recognize that this electricity, through the company we are working with, was for the benefit of the people. We do not want to penalize the people.

However, the situation has deteriorated to the point that we have brought in sanctions. After the Houla massacre, we have now created bigger sanctions, and no Canadian company is allowed to be operating in Syria.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, tonight it is with a heavy heart and a troubled conscience, frankly, that I get up to speak on the issue of Syria. The troubled part is because of what we have heard from the government side already and what we will hear throughout the night of the troubles within Syria, the massacre at Houla and the mass atrocities that are happening in real time. The troubled conscience is the fact that we have seen this kind of event before.

In 1993, when President Clinton at the time was opening the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, well-respected Holocaust survivor and Nobel peace prize winner Elie Wiesel said to the president after speeches were made, "Mr. President, what have we learned?" He then went on to say "Mr. President, I cannot not tell you something. I have been in the former Yugoslavia last fall. I cannot sleep since for what I have seen. ...I am saying that we must do something to stop the bloodshed in that country."

Of course, we know what happened in the former Yugoslavia after that. That was 1993. It was just the next year that Rwanda happened. It is interesting that just this past April, Mr. Wiesel was in Washington again, at the museum, and this time it was President Obama he was speaking to. He posed the question yet again: "What have we learned?"

This is a question we need to examine. What have we learned when it comes to preventing mass atrocities? What have we learned in terms of stopping mass atrocities?

Government Orders

It has already been noted that these atrocities have been happening. We think of April 6, 1994. That was the date of the beginning of the Rwandan genocide. We think of what happened on July 12, 1995, in Srebrenica. The world witnessed that. Now the date that will be known along with these other dates will be May 2012, and it will be Houla, Syria.

We are just starting to understand what happened in Syria. The numbers are 108 civilians killed, 34 of them women. The part that has grabbed us all is how many were children. There were 49 children. I heard the witness, an 11-year-old boy, Ali, talk about what happened in Houla that night. He said:

They came in armoured vehicles and there were some tanks. They shot five bullets through the door of our house. They said they wanted Araf and Shwaki, my father and my brother. Then they asked about my uncle, Abu Haidar. They also knew his name.

Shivering with fear, the boy stood toward the back of his family home as gunmen then shot dead every family member in front of him. It was an 11-year-old boy who witnessed this. He said:

My mum yelled at them. She asked: 'What do you want from my husband and son?' A bald man with a beard shot her with a machine gun from the neck down. Then they killed my sister...with the same gun. She was five years old. They then shot my brother...in the head and in the back. I saw his soul leave his body in front of me.

They shot at me, but the bullet passed me and I wasn't hit. I was shaking so much I thought they would notice me. I put blood on my face to make them think I'm dead.

Apparently the gunmen were convinced their work was finished. They moved on to other areas of the house from which they proceeded to loot the family's possessions. The boy said they stole three televisions and a computer and then they got ready to leave. On the way out of the house the boy said they found the three men they had been looking for. They killed them all.

The boy said:

They shot my father and uncle. And then they found my oldest brother...near the door. They shot him dead too.

● (1935)

Many have seen the images. This is a description. This is from an 11-year-old boy.

I have two sons of my own. I cannot imagine what it would be like to have one of my sons witness not just the murder but the targeting and the wanton destruction of human life.

We have to ask ourselves, "How is it the world can watch? What have we learned?"

We have learned a couple of things. I have already posed a question to the government that there comes a time to act, and the action of dismissing the ambassadors is one.

I believe we should have acted earlier when it comes to Canadian companies that were still functioning in Syria. In fact, we called on the government to ask that Suncor leave Syria. The government said that it was providing electricity. Suncor did get the message and left, but it was due to the sanctions from the EU, not the sanctions from Canada. What have we learned? We need to act.

I believe it is important to acknowledge that this is not a case in which we can have military intervention. I think the government understands that. I think most people in the House understand it.

Because of the situation in Syria, we are deeply concerned and worried about the fallout from any kind of military intervention.

There are those who say that there should be support for the other side, for the rebels. I know that in Washington right now Senator McCain has called for that. Presidential candidate Romney has said that there should be a focus on cutting off the arms supply from Russia on the one hand, but we should supply arms to the other side. Clearly, it is dangerous to add more fuel to the fire.

A military option in that sense is not an option, yet we see these horrific crimes happening.

The crimes that I just described are most likely done with the support of the regime through the shabiha, which in Arabic is "ghosts". These paramilitary groups are supported by the government and go and do the bidding of the regime.

Where do they get their support from? They get it from the government, but they have also been armed very well. We have to acknowledge that the ramping of arms in the region has created very dangerous circumstances, so we need to put pressure on governments such as Russia's to stop the arms flow.

That is where I think we need to focus. We need to put pressure on those who are continuing to support this regime. Most people understand that.

In terms of dealing with this situation right now, we of course support the Annan peace plan, but frankly, it is not enough. We need to see more UN observers on the ground. We need to see the regime adhering to the conditions of that plan. We also need to put pressure on Russia. In fact, all roads lead to Moscow when it comes to trying to deal with this situation.

It is also important to note that the media need to continue to be seized with this issue. The media has a responsibility, as has been identified when people have looked at mass atrocities and prevention.

Finally, we have more to do here. Canada needs to focus on the UN. Frankly, we need to earn our seat back on the Security Council. Alas, we do not have it, but we should earn our seat back. We should invest in conflict resolution. We should particularly support women and those who are fleeing violence.

We need to, in the end, answer the question that I posed at the beginning—"What have we learned?"—and not cease until we have answered that question.

We have a moment that we can resolve this in a way that is multilateral and diplomatic and that is what we need to focus on until the killing stops, until we see that 11-year-old boys in Syria are not going to tell stories of massacre but stories we all have our kids enjoy, normal stories of play, school and everyday life.

● (1940)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Chair, first he asked the question, "What have we learned?" What we have learned is that we cannot trust Bashar al-Assad. He is untrustworthy, he has broken all his promises and he has blood on his hands.

Government Orders

In the meantime, the hon. member has said many things that Canada can do, which we have been doing. We will consult with him when he comes up with ideas on what we should do.

One of the issues the member has raised is using pressure. As he said, all roads lead to Russia. I would like to advise the member and everybody else in the House that this issue has been raised dozens of times with the Russians, most recently with the foreign minister in Washington only two weeks ago at the G8 and with the ambassador here last Friday. Also, the Minister of International Trade is currently in Russia. Therefore, yes, we understand that and we are engaged with Russia and we will continue to engage with Russia.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Madam Chair, that is fine. We also know the government just announced that it is ramping up trade negotiations with Russia. I hope the Conservatives take the opportunity to focus on this issue right now because the priority now for most Canadians, when it comes to Syria, is ensuring that Russia acts. The priority is not trade with Russia right now, it is about action when it comes to Syria and I hope that is the focus of the government.

I should also underline that this is a wider issue around how the government behaves on corporate social responsibility. I know the Minister of Foreign Affairs often says we will not go just go along to get along. When it was Suncor and it was a matter of saying that this was an action that we should be taking, pulling it out, it seemed like we were going along to get along and it was not until the EU sanctions forced Suncor out.

The government also needs to be consistent in supporting the UN and that means being more respectful of those who represent the UN, ensuring we see the UN as not being perfect, and we all know that. However, when we look at situations like Syria right now, the UN is the institution we have to work in to get something done.

I urge the government not only to focus on Russia with regard to Syria, but also to focus on the UN and support the institution of the UN respectfully. As a good model, I would suggest how Norway has done with the UN and it has been very effective.

● (1945)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Chair, I appreciate my hon. colleague's speech. We have worked together on the foreign affairs committee for some time now. He mentioned Russia. He mentioned the UN Security Council.

Could he tell us exactly how he would suggest that the international community and Canada force Russia to abandon its position on Syria, its long-standing relationship with Syria and the fact that it has a veto on the Security Council? What would he suggest that Canada or other countries could do differently to ensure that Russia moves off this untenable position and acts immediately to help save lives of people in Syria?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Madam Chair, first, priorities should be focused on Syria right now with Russia, saying the trade deal and those negotiations are not the priority, and to set that aside until we see some action from Russia, but also getting our allies involved here. It is clearly not going to be just because of Canada that Russia will act. It is important that we act with our allies in the region. A contact group would be the way to go in terms of structure, of getting those

who can gain the ear of Russia to work together in a coordinated fashion.

As members know, the flow of arms in the trade that continues with Syria comes from Russia and if we get Russia, I believe we can get China which is the other veto on the Security Council.

Finally, as I said before, it is also important that Canada support and respect the UN and that we show we are responsible when it comes to the UN and we earn back the trust of members of the UN so we will also one day have our seat back on the Security Council which, of course, would give us more influence.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Madam Chair, as the parliamentary secretary was saying, Russia and Syria have an important relationship. However, Canada also has a good relationship with Syria when it comes to trade. It should be noted that Syria is a major economic partner to Canada and that many Canadian investors invest in Syria.

What can be done, in that respect, to put more pressure on Syria?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Madam Chair, that brings up the question of a coordinated effort. We do have a lot of business interests, but we obviously cannot do this alone. If we look at the confluence of contacts within the business community, ensuring that those who have done truck and trade in the past with the regime or truck and trade with countries that are continuing to do business with Syria, then that could be something we push.

I should take a moment to underline that we need to push the issue of an investigation on Houla. There is an opportunity here. We could push Russia to get an outside independent investigation of what happened this past weekend in Houla to ensure that there would be an independent investigation. We have the regime saying that it wants to ensure that there is an investigation. We could ask Russia, which is trusted by this regime, to push for this as well. It could be something that allows for some action to take place.

Finally, we need to strengthen the Annan initiative. It is something that everyone was hoping would have done more. Clearly it needs to be strengthened and we need to convince our two Security Council representatives, China and Russia, to accept that process.

● (1950)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like the hon. member for Ottawa Centre to say a few words about something he has not yet had time to raise, and that is the situation of ethnic minorities.

To what extent are the ethnic minorities at risk in the Syrian conflict? We know there are strong ethnic tensions in that region and in Syria in particular.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Paul Dewar: Madam Chair, most people who have studied Syria know that this is a very diverse country. There are diversities within religion and ethnic groups. We know that Assad has done a very good job of knitting together alliances with different groups. From a minority group himself, that is how he has been able to hold onto power.

Clearly what should be underlined here is the need to ensure that minorities not be targeted. We saw what happened after the fallout from the war in Iraq. The dissent into chaos was not just about a civil war so to speak. It was about ethnic groups fighting each other and targeting each other based on religion. We also saw the sad spectacle of al-Qaeda coming in to a place where it had no reach at all before. This remains a concern.

Those who would say “arm the other side”, I would ask them if they know who the other side is. Be careful because it could be extremists. There was a bombing recently where I believe 54 soldiers were killed on the Syrian government side. Some are suggesting that outside militants were involved. We do not know, but we should be cautious.

At the end of the day, we see many groups that are concerned that their ethnicity and religion are targets for those who wish to take out grievances. We need to be vigilant on this.

Finally, we need to support both Jordan and Turkey which are receiving many of the refugees fleeing this violence.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in the debate this evening, though, as my colleague from Ottawa Centre put it, with a heavy heart given the atrocities there.

The death and destruction, brutality and barbarism, of the Syrian government's latest massacres of its own civilians, as described by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the member for Ottawa Centre, have passed a tipping point, indeed if it had not been passed before, mandating the invocation and application by the UN Security Council of the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine and requisite international action.

The massacre in Houla followed a familiar pattern of Syrian assault and brutality. Syrian tanks, heavy weapons and artillery, which were to have been withdrawn to barracks, in accordance with the UN security resolution endorsing the Kofi Annan peace plan, indiscriminately bombarded the Syrian town of Houla and followed it up with a particularly barbaric slaughter of its inhabitants, a wanton execution even by the standards of Hafez al-Assad, going house to house with guns, axes and knives, leaving more than 108 dead, 49 of whom were children.

The Syrian government argues that this was the work of “armed terrorists”, but it was Syrian tanks and artillery that encircled and bombed Houla, in violation of the UN-supported ceasefire that itself has been violated again and again, and Syrian militias, Shabihas, as attested to by the UN monitors themselves, that perpetrated the atrocities.

Moreover, the weekend blood-letting in Houla was followed by still more killing of 50 civilians in Homs, the oft repeated target of such brutal assaults, again in violation of this “ceasefire”.

Indeed, the massacre was so barbaric in its brutality that the Security Council moved quickly, in the aftermath of the Houla massacre, to unanimously condemn:

—in the strongest possible terms the killings, confirmed by United Nations observers...in attacks that involved a series of Government artillery and tank shellings on a residential neighbourhood.

The non-binding UN Security Council statement continued:

Such outrageous use of force against civilian population constitutes a violation of applicable international law and of the commitments of the Syrian Government under United Nations Security Council resolutions...

However, the Security Council action was only a press statement, not even a presidential statement, such that it does not even form part of the record of the UN Security Council. Shockingly, it is as if, for the official record of the UN Security Council, this massacre never took place. Nor was this a resolution of the UN Security Council itself. Nor did it contain any reference to the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine, let alone invoke the doctrine as authority for collective action by the international community.

Such collective action need not, and I think this needs to be stated, involve only military action or even involve a military action. There is a whole series of initiatives that the Security Council can take that I hope to get to in my remarks and outline what said resolution could include.

However, the tipping point for R2P has clearly arrived. Indeed, this is a paradigm case for the invocation of the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine. More than 12,000 Syrian civilians have been murdered, close to 1,000 of them since the UN-endorsed Annan peace plan went into effect on April 12, and some 13 months have passed since *The Economist* published a cover story in April 2011, entitled “Savagery in Syria”. Thousands more have been imprisoned, some of whom were tortured and executed in detention, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. And while Kofi Annan was visiting with the Syrian leader just last week, in the aftermath of the Houla massacre, there was, yet again, the discovery of grisly murders in Assukar in eastern Syria.

Indeed, the UN-approved Annan peace plan has been unravelling, if it has not already unravelled. Simply put, the unarmed 290 peace monitors dispatched under the plan have not so much monitored the ceasefire, which has yet to occur, as much as they have been used as a political cover for the killings themselves and the violations of the peace plan itself.

● (1955)

First, the Annan peace plan called for “a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms”, and for the Syrian government to “immediately cease troop movement towards, and end the use of heavy weapons in, population centres,” as a condition for the ceasefire, but the Syrian government has been violating this requirement since it was adopted, increasing its troop movements and bombardment of population centres, such as occurred two weeks ago and since, while the brutality of the regime has continued unabated.

Government Orders

Second, the Annan plan sought the “timely provision of humanitarian assistance”; yet by all accounts, Syria is experiencing a humanitarian disaster, with one million civilians deprived of food, shelter and medicine, the basic staples of humanitarian relief.

Third, the plan sought to “intensify the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons”; yet arbitrary detentions and torture in detention have continued, as have disappearances and executions.

Fourth, the plan sought to ensure freedom of movement for journalists and a non-discriminatory visa policy for them; yet much of the country remains closed to those who would seek to report on the regime's crimes and thereby even deter them.

Fifth, the plan called for respect for freedom of association and “the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed”; but Syrians who have demonstrated peacefully, as occurred recently in Aleppo, do so at their peril, if not at the peril of their lives.

Finally, the peace plan called for a transition to a “democratic, plural political system” to address “the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people”; but this undertaking is repeatedly mocked by the Syrian government's justification of the killings on the grounds that those who sought a democratic, pluralist political system were terrorists, thereby justifying the massacre in Houla, for example.

The question then becomes: What needs to be done, and as the member for Ottawa Centre put it, what have we learned in order to resolve what needs to be done?

One is reminded, and it bears a reminder at this point, of the poignant and painful dispatch of U.K.-based journalist Marie Colvin just before she herself was murdered in the assault on Homs two months ago, wherein she decried the Syrian government's “merciless disregard” for the humanity of the Syrian people. Her last words bear recalling, particularly this evening. “Am in Baba Amr. Sickening. Cannot understand how the world can stand by, and I should be hardened by now.... Feeling helpless.... No one here can understand how the international community can let this happen”.

Simply put, Marie Colvin sought to sound the alarm on the crimes against humanity being perpetrated by the Assad regime against the Syrian people, the classic rationale for the invocation of the responsibility to protect doctrine, when the state, as in the case of Syria, is the author of that criminality. Indeed, one might also ask what happened to the hallowed R2P doctrine.

At the UN world summit in 2005, more than 150 heads of state and governments unanimously adopted a declaration on the responsibility to protect, authorizing international collective action to protect a state's population “from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”. If that state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens, or worse, as in the case of Syria, that state is the author of such criminality.

When the peaceful protests in Syria began in March 2011 in Daraa, triggered by the arrest of young Syrians whose only crime was anti-regime graffiti, Syrian demonstrators then took to the streets, olive branches in their hands, proclaiming “peaceful, peaceful”, the march heralding the prospective blossoming of the Syrian Arab Spring after both Tunisia and Egypt.

Since then, those seeking freedom and democracy have looked for international support and solidarity in their struggle against the murderous regime. Accordingly, what is required now is a UN Security Council resolution. It is astonishing that no such resolution has yet to be adopted after 14 months of mass atrocity in order to implement the conditions of the initial Arab League peace plan, which evolved into the UN-sponsored Annan peace plan. It is time we acted on our international obligations under the R2P doctrine, whose first pillar is that of “sovereignty has responsibility”.

In particular, what is so necessary now is a comprehensive, consequential and binding UN Security Council resolution that would include the following elements.

First is the cessation of Syrian government violence; the mandated deployment of an Arab-led peace protection force in Syria; and the ordering of troops and tanks back to barracks and bases.

Clearly, the deployment of 290 unarmed UN monitors, not unlike the initial deployment of Arab League monitors, has ended up with the monitors being observers to the killings rather than a protection force to prevent the killings to begin with.

• (2000)

Second is protecting against the vulnerability of the targeted civilian neighbourhoods, and the related refugee flow toward Syria's Turkish, Lebanese and Jordanian borders, through the establishment of civilian protection zones, which Anne-Marie Slaughter referred to as no-kill zones, along Syria's international borders.

Third is the provision of unfettered access to the sick and wounded for the humanitarian agencies such as the International Red Cross and Syrian Red Crescent. People are dying as much of hunger as by bullets, as much of neglect as by artillery. As Jakob Kellenberger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, put it three months ago, and it has only gotten worse since:

It is unacceptable that people who have been in need of emergency assistance for weeks have still not received any help.

Fourth, the UN resolution, pursuant to its implementation of the Annan peace plan, must mandate media access, both as a means of providing independent verification of violations of the plan, if not to help deter these violations—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I must interrupt the hon. member. The time has elapsed. Perhaps he can add some more in comments and questions.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Government Orders

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, now that the three major parties have already made their positions clear, it is absolutely clear that all of us are seriously concerned with the situation that is taking place in Syria, aside from a few partisan jabs by the NDP. Otherwise, we are all on the same line, that being that action needs to be taken in reference to what is happening in Syria. I am delighted tonight that we have all had the opportunity, from here representing Canadians, to make a very strong statement to the Assad regime that its actions, its atrocities, are not acceptable.

At one point the NDP was talking about, as I said, the partisan thing of not being on the Security Council. However, the hon. member for Mount Royal has already stated quite clearly how ineffective the Security Council has been up to now in reference to taking action.

As recently as today, both the presidents of Russia and China have said they will not endorse the regime change in Syria, all saying quite clearly they would be supporting the Assad regime. They said it even today. Both of them have veto power at the Security Council to stop any kind of a resolution, including the right to protect out there. We have just called for the Security Council to take action.

I would say to the NDP that we took a strong stand at the Human Rights Council in Geneva by sponsoring the condemnation of the Syrian regime. It does not only have to be the Security Council. There are other venues like when Canada sponsored the Iranian resolution condemning Iran at the General Assembly. Therefore, we can do it. I am very happy and glad to see that the member brought the question—

● (2005)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would like to give the hon. member an opportunity to respond.

The hon. member for Mount Royal.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Madam Chair, other agencies such as the United Nations Human Rights Council do have a role to play. When I had to abbreviate my remarks, I was about to follow with that which the UN Human Rights Council can do by way of an independent commission of inquiry as recently voted upon. The problem is Syria, because it does not admit that UN commission of inquiry in order to engage in that investigation.

Similarly with regard to the UN Security Council, the UN Security Council has not been the problem. It has adopted resolutions, admittedly somewhat belatedly. The problem has been China and Russia, which have vetoed those resolutions. I might add that two unanimous resolutions were passed, but they were not resolutions, actually; they were more by way of a presidential statement.

What is needed at this point is a binding UN Security Council resolution, the elements of which I have sought to describe. Maybe I might just continue to give some of those elements that I could not give before for reasons of time.

What is needed are expanded and enhanced sanctions that the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the U.K., France and others have called for. In other words, global travel bans and asset freezes, utter diplomatic isolation and condemnation, the expulsion

of Syrian diplomats, as our government and others have done, and the treatment of the Syrian government as the pariah it has become, devoid of any legitimacy.

I might add that the Syrian government has continued to violate all principles and canons of international law. One need only look at the documentary evidence in this regard to appreciate that the authorizations for all these violations have come from the highest levels of the Syrian government, from every layer of the Assad regime's military intelligence and security apparatus. They have to be held accountable for their war crimes, and they have to be put on notice that they will be held accountable.

Seventh, and again pursuant to the Annan peace plan, the UN resolution must require the release of all arbitrarily detained persons and political prisoners. Any resolution must order and implement, as a means for verifying, a complete arms embargo again as a condition of maintaining the peace, and the member for Ottawa Centre mentioned this as well. Just recently there have been documented reports of arms shipments by Russia to Syria. We need a complete arms embargo.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I want to give the member for Mount Royal a chance to expand even further if he wishes to.

I have a question and maybe just a response to my friend from the government side. My statement was that we need to earn back our security council seat, because we lost it. This was simply an observation and not partisan. We would be able to do that, I am sure, if we demonstrate respect for the UN. That is a simple observation and it is a proposition for my colleague. This is in the spirit of a proposition.

However, I want to ask my colleague to expand more. One idea that has come forward is the idea of a motion from the general assembly along the lines of what my colleague has outlined, to put more pressure on both China and Russia and to show that the general assembly also has a role here. Granted it is not in a position of ultimate power, but perhaps it would be another way to put pressure on those countries that are on the security council that are vetoing what are good initiatives, as he has already laid out. Perhaps that would be another way to continue to put pressure on both China and Russia.

● (2010)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Yes, Madam Chair, I would support such a resolution by the UN General Assembly. We could get a preponderant vote in the UN General Assembly because we have to appreciate that Russia and China are isolated. The UN Security Council resolutions that they vetoed, 13 members of the UN Security Council supported. The United Nations Human Rights Council proposed a commission of inquiry and it was only Russia, China and Cuba that opposed it and 43 supported it. Again, they were isolated.

A UN General Assembly resolution would show that the preponderant membership of the international community is in support of some of the elements that I and my colleagues have mentioned this evening and would further isolate Russia and China and exercise a kind of diplomatic leverage that perhaps could shame them into supporting a UN Security Council resolution.

Government Orders

I will continue with some of the elements, as the member for Ottawa Centre invited me to do. This resolution, pursuant to the Annan peace plan, should mandate an inclusive political dialogue and process that genuinely respects the legitimate aspirations of the whole of the Syrian people, including the large majority that are not Alawi and in which, as the UN plan put it, “citizens are equal regardless of their affiliations, ethnicities or beliefs” and with a view to President Assad stepping down as part of that process.

The international community needs to leverage, as I mentioned, Russia and China. We need to do so in such a way that Russia in particular has to appreciate that if it seeks to be part of a Middle East peace process, as it always has aspired to do, and if it seeks legitimacy as a superpower, which it aspires to be, then it must conduct itself as a legitimate superpower would, as one that cares about peace in the Middle East would and, thereby, not veto such a UN Security Council resolution.

In the event that it would continue to seek to veto such a resolution I will invoke here as a recommendation the Kosovo precedent. This was referred to by the member for Ottawa Centre. When Kosovo occurred, we did not have a unanimous resolution that authorized intervention at the time. We had only a majority at the time because Russia had vetoed it as well. We even have a larger and more significant majority now for a resolution with regard to Syria than we had with regard to Kosovo. I would recommend that in the event that we do not get full unanimity, then we should adopt the Kosovo precedent.

In conclusion, Syria is a case study of the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine: first, the notion of the principle of sovereignty as responsibility, a country's responsibility to protect its citizens; second, and this I take up with my colleague from Ottawa Centre, the responsibility to remember the lessons of history, *le devoir de mémoire* of the dangers of indifference and the importance of the responsibility to even prevent atrocities to begin with; third, the dangers of inaction in the face of mass atrocity and the responsibility to act in order to hold the perpetrators accountable; fourth, the danger of impunity and the responsibility to bring the perpetrators to justice.

As UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon has put it, “loss of time means more loss of lives”. Tragically, we have not yet done what needs to be done in order to save lives.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Chair, the violence in Syria continues to take a terrible toll on the civilian population. Canadians were horrified to learn the details of the May 25 massacre in Houla, Syria. Shockingly, the dead included 49 children, executed in cold blood.

Despite an international outcry and the UN Security Council condemnation, Syrian forces continue to assault the people of Houla. This slaughter underscores the appalling impact of the Assad regime's efforts to repress the people of Syria. Since the violence began more than 9,000 Syrians, most of them civilians, have lost their lives. Tens of thousands have been displaced from their homes and communities, and more than one million are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

Canada has soundly condemned the Assad regime's vicious attacks on civilian populations. We welcomed the UN Security Council's condemnation of the killings in Houla, which noted that such outrageous use of force against the civilian population constitutes a violation of international law. We echo the Security Council's demands that the government of Syria immediately cease the use of heavy weapons in population centres and return troops to their barracks. We join the Security Council and our allies in calling for those responsible for the heinous attacks against the Syrian population, the regime of Bashar al-Assad, to be brought to justice.

Canada stands with the Syrian people in their time of need. In March, the Minister of International Cooperation, announced a contribution of up to \$7.5 million in humanitarian assistance to allow humanitarian organizations to provide urgent life-saving relief inside Syria and in neighbouring countries. This support will provide Syrians affected by the violence with emergency food assistance, safe water, sanitation facilities, essential household items and other much needed help.

Recent attacks in Houla underscore the brutal reign of a tyrannical regime. The people of Syria, a proud people, devoted to their homes and their communities, have chosen to flee their country and seek refuge outside its borders. More than 70,000 people and their families are currently receiving help in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. In these countries, it is the quiet heroism of ordinary people who open their doors and their homes for those in need. We honour their humanity.

For many of those remaining in Syria the outlook is grim. Relief workers with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as UN agencies, are making heroic efforts to meet the urgent life-saving needs of those affected by the violence. However, these efforts continue to be obstructed by the Assad regime.

Last month, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Cooperation welcomed Valerie Amos, UN emergency relief coordinator, to Ottawa to discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria. The UN has made it clear to Syria that the humanitarian needs are enormous and access is required by the UN to provide urgent life-saving assistance. Canada continues to call for full, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian workers to reach those in need. Those in positions of power in Syria must move quickly to facilitate relief efforts. Our government will continue to press at every opportunity until that access is granted.

Canada is appalled by the threats to safety and security faced by humanitarian workers in Syria. Already, the Secretary General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and two Red Crescent volunteers have lost their lives in the line of duty. We mourn their loss and we pay tribute to their courage. We condemn the lack of respect for life-saving medical services in Syria. Medical personnel, facilities and ambulances must not be targeted and health care personnel must be able to provide aid in safety and without hindrance. The Red Cross and the Red Crescent emblems must be respected by all sides.

Government Orders

● (2015)

Canada continues to support the efforts of the international community to bring an end to the violence. Recent evidence of mass graves dug by the regime's butchers is irrefutable. We have repeatedly called on all parties to co-operate with UN observers, to respect the ceasefire, and to support the efforts of Kofi Annan, joint special envoy, to resolve the crisis, including full implementation of the six-point peace plan. The plan requires the cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties to protect civilians, and calls upon all parties to ensure the timely provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting.

The UN Security Council has repeatedly condemned the violence in Syria, including the Houla massacre, but the time has come for stronger action. The Security Council must increase the pressure on Assad to end what is rapidly becoming a humanitarian catastrophe by adopting strong sanctions against the regime.

Canada has enacted strict economic sanctions against the Assad regime and has recently expelled all remaining Syrian diplomats. We call on countries around the world to adopt equally strong measures against the Assad regime to ensure that it fulfills its commitments and immediately stops the senseless slaughter of its own people. We call on countries with ties to Syria to urge an immediate implementation of the ceasefire and other provisions of the Annan plan before the humanitarian situation becomes more dire.

We call on countries with ties to Syria to offer evidence for how the Assad regime is any better than all the other alternatives.

The violence in Syria must end. The people of Syria must be saved from oppression and attacks. Civilians denied the necessities of life must be provided with humanitarian assistance. The international community must redouble its efforts to pressure the Syrian regime. The Government of Canada will continue to monitor the humanitarian situation in Syria and work with our partners in an effort to end the suffering of civilians and ensure life-saving assistance reaches those who need it most.

● (2020)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Chair, we state the facts on this side of the room. We were surprised, for instance when Canada lost its seat on the Security Council and did not even bother the second time around to be a candidate for a seat on the Security Council, because of the reputation we lost.

These are facts. We cannot deny them. I would like to ask a question with respect to international law. It is unfortunate that our colleague from Mount Royal is already gone because I wanted to ask a similar question.

When one is a member state of the UN—

The Chair: It is a rule in the House that we cannot mention the presence or absence of a sitting member, just for the record.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Chair, I withdraw those comments.

When one is a member state of the United Nations, there are certain obligations under the UN Charter. One of the obligations is

the promotion and protection of human rights of all, in any given situation.

We know that Russia is perhaps the only international player that has a certain influence in Syria. What is the government's plan right now to influence Russia with respect to what is going on in Syria? All parties in any given conflict must be held to the same standards in international law and with respect to human rights. What is the plan of the government in that regard?

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, regardless of our status, of not being on the Security Council, Canada has punched much above its weight in its humanitarian involvement globally.

We are the only country in the world that is currently paid up in all of our contributions to our multilateral partners. We have contributed enormous amounts of money through organizations like the GAVI Alliance, where just a year ago we contributed an extra \$50 million to assist with humanitarian issues around the world.

We have stepped up to the plate in this situation by contributing money to help those people who have been displaced and who have lost their homes in Syria. We are punching above our weight. Canada has a very fine reputation on the global scene.

● (2025)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for Newmarket—Aurora and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation for her speech. I know that she works very hard and cares about the interests of people who are in need around the world.

I would like to get back to a particular topic she touched upon in her speech. She spoke about countries neighbouring Syria. Does Canada have a plan for what we can do to support the neighbouring countries that will receive an influx of Syrian refugees fleeing the country? As she mentioned, this has already started.

What will we do to help the people in these countries support this growing influx of Syrian refugees?

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, my colleague's question gives me the opportunity to highlight some of the incredible work that humanitarian workers have done in the area despite the very difficult access they have. With CIDA support, our partners are meeting the humanitarian needs of the victims of violence.

I will give my colleague a few statistics. The Red Cross has distributed food and other essential items to 350,000 people and is providing emergency assistance and medical care for the wounded. The Syrian Red Crescent Society has been able to distribute essentials to 60,000 people. The United Nations World Food Programme provided food assistance to 235,000 people. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is assisting 73,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq.

We will continue working with our partners on these issues. Canada will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Government Orders

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Madam Chair, it must be a considerable challenge to deal with two issues at the same time. One is the brutal regime and the difficult situation that is going on in Syria. At the same time, because we are Canadians, we believe in our hearts that we have a responsibility to provide international aid and international development and to do the very best we can for the most vulnerable people in difficult situations.

The parliamentary secretary talked a bit about some of the things that we have been doing. Could she tell the House tonight about some of the challenges and how we have been able to overcome some of the challenges and ensuring that we continue to provide the appropriate level of international aid and development assistance to the people of Syria who really need it in these very challenging times?

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, the question allows me to highlight some of the conversations that took place between Valerie Amos and our Minister of International Cooperation and our Minister of Foreign Affairs when she was here on May 25.

She talked about the work that we needed to do with our international partners, our allies. She updated us as donors on the humanitarian situation in Syria and the United Nations response. She stated that the government of Syria and the United Nations had agreed on the modalities for the implementation of the response, things such as the scale of the needs and that approximately one million people were affected with recognition by the government of Syria. However, that number may have already have changed. It might have increased since May 25. Ms. Amos also talked about the key priority locations of affected populations and identified to locations that needed to be worked in.

Ms. Amos identified the key sectors that needed to be addressed, the mode of implementation, including distribution without discrimination, the placement of international staff who will address all those affected, and not just the refugee mandate, and the involvement of international NGOs currently in the country and national and local NGOs who will assist in the relief efforts.

As I said before, we will continue to work with our allies. It is always an enormous job to ensure that people have potable water and sanitation facilities in particular, and moving from that, to ensure that those with medical needs are addressed first. We will continue working with our allies on that and we will continue to consult with people like Ms. Amos.

• (2030)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Chair, I heard my colleague talking about humanity. The government was well aware of the human rights violations in Syria and yet it continued to trade with the Assad regime, which made us the third largest investor in Syria. How could the government continue with business as usual when it knew there were extremely grave human rights violations in Syria?

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, I think my colleague is referring to the fact that Suncor is still doing work in the country of Syria.

We have been very concerned for some time, but we also knew there were companies working in Syria that were providing

necessities, such as electricity, to the people of Syria. We knew it would not do well to detriment the people of Syria because we had one situation that we were concerned with.

We will continue to monitor the situation. We continue to be very concerned about the humanitarian situation within Syria and we have said all along that the Assad regime must go.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Madam Chair, today we are having a debate on the situation in Syria, and the situation is extremely worrying.

Since March 2011, so for over a year, there has been persistent violence in Syria. All of this because of an existing regime that has used oppression to remain in power. According to the UN, more than 9,000 people are dead and thousands have been displaced by the conflict. We all know the living conditions this type of armed conflict creates for refugees. Their lives are filled with fear and instability, often in mediocre conditions.

Bashar al-Assad promised to bring in liberalization when he took power in 2000. This liberalization was short-lived. Critics of the regime were imprisoned, the national media were strictly controlled, and it is no secret that a select government elite controls economic policy.

It is certainly unfortunate that a man, a doctor by training and who surely took the Hippocratic oath, is continuing on a path that will certainly bring great suffering to his people.

The recent massacres in Houla are appalling. Like the Government of Canada, the NDP condemned these atrocities. Syrians decided to take to the streets to demonstrate their desire for democracy, a desire that the government is trying to silence. This is a right that has been taken away from them; a right that this country considers fundamental.

For over a year now, the Assad regime has been attempting to suppress the uprising of the Syrian people, who were inspired by events that occurred in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, better known in the international media as the Arab Spring.

Like the whole international community, we support the six-point peace plan put forward by Kofi Annan. The violence against the people of Syria and innocent civilians must stop. It is important that a peaceful transition that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people be achieved.

The international community imposed sanctions on the Assad regime. UN observers were sent to Syria and Syrian ambassadors were expelled from several countries. In a desperate gesture, Bashar al-Assad today expelled the Canadian chargé d'affaires. Mr. Assad's regime is now more internationally isolated than ever. However, China and Russia are the only two countries that still support Damascus, and they have veto power on the UN Security Council.

Government Orders

Having a foreign policy that is worthy of Canada means taking action that shows the whole world what values we stand up for. It is through the policies we adopt and the things we say, this evening for example, that we can demonstrate that Canada is a leader in defending the values of justice, fraternity and human rights. That is why Canada must ensure that it uses all possible diplomatic pressures to ensure that both countries, China and Russia, place pressure on Syria to end these atrocities against the people of Syria.

It is critical for the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to sit down with their Russian and Chinese counterparts as often and as long as is needed to exhort them to use their leadership and to play an active and decisive role in achieving a genuine ceasefire that will save the lives of innocent civilians. If the government can place pressure on the Syrian government to stop massacring its own citizens, then the government can also use its influence on other countries like Russia and China to have them force Syria to show respect for human rights. It is not a matter of choice, but a basic and necessary issue. There is no choice.

● (2035)

The government must not choose between its economic and diplomatic relations. Defenceless civilians are waiting for Canada to act. The international community is watching to see what Canada does. Canada must exercise its leadership to obtain a genuine ceasefire, which will save the lives of thousands of innocent civilians, children and women, who are being massacred every day. Unfortunately, in conflicts of this type, women and children are often the biggest victims.

The Government of Canada must also encourage these states to begin negotiations in order to establish a road map for reforms that will meet the legitimate demands of the Syrian people.

Canada must also provide urgent humanitarian aid to the refugees fleeing the violence in Syria. The Turkish crisis management centre announced on Tuesday that over 2,000 Syrians had arrived in Turkey over the past three days. The number of Syrian refugees accommodated in camps set up by the Turkish Red Crescent in southern Syria has reached 26,747.

Moreover, the Security Council should also consider seizing the International Criminal Court in relation to the events of May 25 in Houla. Despite the fact that the Syrian government agreed to a ceasefire, it continues to bomb civilians. There was total carnage despite the presence of UN observers, I should point out. That is why Canada must redouble its efforts and put pressure on Syria. As I said, there was total carnage on May 25, with over 108 deaths, including 49 children. Syria should co-operate fully with the court and the prosecutor, and provide assistance as required, while recognizing that the Rome Statute imposes no obligation on states that are not a party to it. This is the case with Syria. However, once again, the role of Russia and China in this issue is key.

We are both so close and yet so far from being able to help the Syrian people. I find it repugnant that one person in power could so freely violate basic human rights, especially since the Syrian people are the ones that gave him the authority to represent them.

In March, Amnesty International published a report condemning the regime's widespread use of torture and other forms of abuse in

Syria. The organization documented 31 methods of torture and other forms of abuse attributed to the security forces, the army, and the armed, pro-government groups known as *shabiha*.

In a statement, Human Rights Watch also condemned the scorched earth methods used by the Syrian army in an attempt to put down the long-lasting uprising in the country. The New York-based NGO deplored the fact that the UN Security Council is being blocked by Russia and China. It considers that, after a year of popular revolt in Syria, the Security Council “should finally stand together and send a clear message to President Assad that these attacks must end”.

With President Vladimir Putin currently in China, it seems to me that the time is right to send them a clear message from the international community.

Resolving this conflict is a matter of the utmost importance, not only to pave the way for the return of peace to Syria but also to make sure that the conflict will not take on disastrous dimensions in the region.

We must not—we cannot—let this conflict continue without a peaceful resolution. We cannot allow the Assad regime crush its people like common bugs. The consequences for the people are going to worsen as long as the conflict rages on. Neither should we allow this conflict to carry on any longer or allow the country to enter into a civil war.

We have already seen the currency collapse. It has been mentioned that the Syrian government may be unable to pay its officials. Although that may be the nail in the coffin of Assad's downfall, we need to take into consideration everything this means for the Syrian people as well.

● (2040)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, during my intervention earlier today, the member asked me a question on the number of Canadians who were left behind in Syria and I said that I would get back to her. I now have the answer. We have approximately 1,496 Canadians registered on the ROCA system and it is estimated that there are 4,500 Canadians still in Syria.

It is important to remember that, since December 2011, we have issued an unqualified call for all Canadians to leave Syria for their own safety. It was very important for the safety of our diplomatic personnel to shut down the embassy. However, we have been calling for Canadians to leave Syria before then. The estimated number of Canadians in Syria is 4,500.

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Chair, I thank the parliamentary secretary for those numbers. I hope the government takes into consideration its duty to protect civilians and ensures that Canadians all over the world have the help they need.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Romeo Saganash): From now on, I would like the hon. member to wait until I give her the floor before she answers the question put to her.

I now give the floor to the member for Saint-Jean.

Government Orders

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Chair, I congratulate the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île for her speech.

She spoke about an important role, a key role, namely, that of Russia. Today, Russia has taken a small step in the right direction by recognizing that, from now on, maintaining Bashar al-Assad in power is no longer an necessary condition.

I would like to hear her comments on that, and I would like her to let us know how that can make us a little more optimistic about the situation.

• (2045)

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for his excellent comments and his question.

This shows that Canada can play a role on the Security Council despite the fact that its role on the international scene has changed somewhat in recent years. Because of that, Canada was not able to obtain a seat on the Security Council, which prevents us from doing certain things. Russia is reaching out to us. I am choosing to use these terms to show that it is possible to negotiate with China and Russia.

As I mentioned in my speech, this is a very critical time right now. Vladimir Putin is in China. I think that Canada should take this opportunity to put even more pressure on the two representatives so that they do not use their veto to block any potential Security Council actions.

I would also like to say that, according to the international community, we must be very careful not to go beyond our role. In this type of situation, where a population is helpless, I think that Canada should be an international leader in human rights and democracy, as it claims to be every day in the House, and hold the Bashar al-Assad regime accountable for its actions.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I listened very closely to the member's speech and to the other speeches that have been made this evening by her colleagues, the NDP critic for foreign affairs and the Liberal member.

There was a lot of discussion about China and Russia, but there is another major elephant in this room that no one has mentioned tonight, and that is Iran.

We all know that Iran supports the Assad regime in Syria and uses it to project its interests in the region. That is a large reason why things are not being done to stop the bloodshed in Syria.

I would like the member to address the question of Iran and the statements that our government has made about Iran. What would the member suggest that Canada and other countries do to put pressure on Iran to stop its support for the Assad regime?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Madam Chair, in fact, with respect to the Security Council, the difference between Iran, China and Russia is perfectly clear. Iran has no veto and cannot impede action by the international community against Syria. This is a rather major difference, because

Iran cannot block international action, unlike Russia and China, which have done so on several occasions.

As my colleague from Saint-Jean mentioned, we are beginning to see some receptiveness by China and Russia to the idea of putting pressure on Syria. However, I fully agree with the government. Last week, we had the same type of debate about the situation in Iran. I was here, in support of the government, condemning the Iranian regime and the support it is giving to Syria. However, the difference is absolutely clear, and I do not believe that the Government of Canada's approach to Russia and China should be the same as its dealings with Iran, because their role on the Security Council is not the same.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, my colleague focused on China and Russia in her speech and mentioned Iran. We have parliamentary secretaries and ministers in the House. What does she think of the idea of having even one of the parliamentary secretaries as a special envoy to be sent to places like China or Russia to ensure the message is clear? I suggested in the House that the Minister of Foreign Affairs should go to Russia, which the foreign affairs minister for the U.K. did, and we should send envoys with that message. The government is negotiating a trade deal with Russia right now and many of us would like priority to be focused on Syria.

We have all these parliamentary secretaries. Maybe we should be sending them directly to China or Russia to deliver the clear message that we want them to be involved in supporting the UN's initiatives.

• (2050)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Madam Chair, it is indeed very important. As I was saying, it is not a matter of choice, but one of necessity.

For many years, we have been repeatedly told by the Government of Canada that it is negotiating various free trade agreements. According to the government, we have become an economic power. That being the case, it is high time that it shouldered its responsibilities and used this influence to put pressure on other governments.

It is true that humanitarian aid is important, that diplomatic pressure is important and that all possible actions to prevent these atrocities from being committed and ensure that human rights are respected are important. However, there is no point hiding the fact that it is through economic relations with other countries that a government, a country, can function and exist.

Canada has the opportunity and the chance to exert this influence on Russia. My colleague did not mention it, but Canada is also in negotiations with China for a free trade agreement. It is therefore important for Canada to show world leadership, not only in terms of humanitarian aid and diplomatic pressure, but also in terms of the economic pressure it can exert, given its influence on other countries, to make it possible for the international community to intervene and prevent the Syrian regime from continuing to commit atrocities.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to participate this evening in this very important debate.

Canadians, like freedom-loving people around the world, have been absolutely horrified by the ongoing brutal violence committed by the Assad regime against the people of Syria. The most recent appalling example of this regime's blatant disregard for humanity and decency was seen on May 25 in the shocking massacre in Houla that left scores of civilians dead, including 49 innocent children. I do not think anybody here will very soon forget the picture of that three-year-old little girl with a bullet hole in the side of her head. This is the kind of horror that we have not really seen since the Second World War.

We are deeply concerned that despite repeated calls for peace and despite pressure from the international community, Assad's reprehensible campaign of terror continues unabated. We continue to call for the immediate implementation of and adherence to the Annan peace plan, which has been endorsed by the United Nations Security Council and the Arab League. We fervently believe that Assad must step down now and allow the Syrian people to build a better, brighter future and to live in peace and security.

As if the consequences of the crimes within Syria itself were not horrible enough, we are now facing the deeply troubling regional implications of this crisis. To begin with, the UN estimates that more than 70,000 refugees have fled Syria to seek shelter in neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

There have been incidents of violence along the Syrian–Lebanese border as well as in the border regions with Turkey. Moreover, in Lebanon we are now increasingly seeing violent confrontations between pro- and anti-Assad factions within that country itself. In a region with such complex and interwoven political, social and economic fabric cutting across national borders, a protracted struggle in Syria carries the risk of dragging other countries into sectarian conflict and proxy wars, exacerbating the existing regional tensions and further victimizing civilians throughout the Middle East. For these reasons, we believe it is imperative that a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis be found.

I will highlight in more detail some of the implications of the conflict for Syria's neighbours, as well as the complex interests and relationships that tie Syria's fate to that of others in the region, including Iran and Israel. This will give even further evidence of why we must work to end the conflict as quickly as possible.

Of all the countries in the region, Turkey has welcomed the largest number of refugees fleeing the violence in Syria. More than 22,000 Syrians are currently registered with the Turkish government, which has established 10 separate locations to deal with the influx and has appealed to NATO, the UN and the EU for international assistance in addressing their needs.

In Lebanon, over 15,000 Syrian refugees are registered with humanitarian agencies. The UN High Commission for Refugees, or UNHCR, and partners are working with the Lebanese government and local authorities to ensure that the needs of refugees in the affected communities are addressed.

Beyond this, the escalating violence in Syria has caused security-related concerns for Lebanon, where in recent weeks pro- and anti-Assad factions clashed in Tripoli and Beirut. Lebanon has also been the site of border incursions by Syrian security forces, as well as of several unsolved disappearances of Syrian opposition figures. Meanwhile, reports indicate that weapons smuggling from Lebanon to Syria continues to grow.

Jordan has also welcomed a sizable wave of Syrian refugees. Over 19,000 Syrians in Jordan have registered with UNHCR since March of last year, and the numbers continue to grow. This is a heavy burden on Jordan's fragile economy and its delicate sectarian balance.

Canada is a good friend to Jordan and continues to strongly support the efforts of His Majesty King Abdullah II to implement reforms that will lay a critical foundation for the strengthening of the economy and Jordanian democracy. As a moderate voice in the region that has helped build bridges to peace, Jordan faces many challenges from the crisis in Syria.

Iraq, which is of course dealing with its own internal instability, has also experienced an influx of refugees fleeing the violence in Syria. Close to 4,000 Syrian refugees of Kurdish origin are registered in Iraq with the UNHCR and its partners providing assistance there.

Another serious concern is the infiltration of terrorist fighters from Iraq into Syria. There are reports that some of the most vicious terrorists now operating in Syria, members of al-Qaeda and related groups, came from Iraq.

● (2055)

If the conflict in Syria continues unabated, there is a risk that the flow of terrorists crossing the Iraq-Syria border will grow, raising the spectre of even greater instability and violence in both countries.

This is why the actions taken by the Assad regime have only added to Syria's instability and to an environment conducive to terrorists and extremist actions. It is in everyone's interest to see a stable, peaceful Syria, one that rejects extremism and upholds the fundamental human rights of its people.

What is Iran's role in all of this? Iran provides support to Syria as a means of promoting its own political, cultural and economic influence and interests in the region. Iran, its clients and proxies do not flinch from using violence and abusing human rights to achieve their aims.

Syria and Iran have been linked since the time of Hafez al-Assad. Together they forged an alliance that allowed Iran to project its influence, its interests, its extremism and its rejection of Israel into the Levant right up to Israel's borders. Through its ally in Damascus, Iran was able to build up its proxies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and a host of extremist Palestinian rejectionist groups, led by Hamas, all of them headquartered in Damascus and sheltered by the Syrian regime. Syria's interest was of course to maintain pressure on Israel to return the Golan Heights and the ability to intervene in Lebanon's affairs to promote its various interests there. Among those who paid the price were Rafik Hariri, the former prime minister of Lebanon, and members of his entourage.

Government Orders

Having made a substantial investment in developing this chain of extremist influence throughout the Middle East, Iran is not about to let a bunch of pro-democracy demonstrators put it at risk. Therefore, there are reliable reports that Iranian money and supplies, including diesel for Syrian tanks, technical expertise, and even specialist soldiers like snipers, are aiding the Syrian regime to oppress its own people. The Iranians have helped the Syrian security forces to intercept telephone communications and to track down activists by tracing their Internet usage. These two criminal regimes are co-operating to cause chaos and destruction throughout the entire region, even as they both brutally oppress their own people.

Canada continues to be seized with developments within Syria and their impact on the broader region. The ongoing violence is appalling by itself, but as I have pointed out, the risk it poses to regional security and stability is even more alarming. For all of these reasons, we steadfastly believe that a solution must be found before more innocent lives are lost and before the crisis further threatens peace and stability in the broader region.

We again call on all parties to immediately and fully respect the ceasefire and to co-operate with UN observers and support the efforts of Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan to resolve the crisis. We call on all Security Council members to come together and adopt strong measures, including economic sanctions, against the Syrian regime. We urge countries with ties to Damascus to use their influence to convince the regime that it must act now to stop the violence. We continue to work with our international partners to isolate the Assad regime and to limit the damage it can cause both to Syria and to the broader region.

Canada supports the Syrian people's hopes for a better, brighter future and is committed to finding a solution to this crisis that will help them achieve it. We hope to see a new democratically elected government of Syria that will respect human rights and the rule of law, including, most importantly, the protection of religious freedoms and religious minority groups, pursuant to article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

• (2100)

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Does he not think that the fact that Canada no longer has a seat on the UN Security Council places us in an unenviable situation in the sense that Canada does not have a lot of weight in the UN decision-making process? In my opinion, when Canada had a seat on the UN Security Council, we had a lot more weight when it came to this kind of decision.

Can the member tell us what Canada has done to try and recover this seat? Having a seat would help us a great deal in the event of global conflicts such as this.

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Madam Chair, I have heard this comment about the UN Security Council made by the opposition several times this evening. Frankly, in my personal opinion, anyone who thinks that Russia or China would have done anything differently, whether

or not Canada was on the UN Security Council, that is just an absurd statement.

As my colleague pointed out earlier this evening, there are 15 permanent members of the UN Security Council and 190 members of the United Nations. The vast majority of all of those countries have been speaking out against the violence in Syria, urging Assad to comply with the UN peace plan, yet the violence continues.

Russia has a veto. China has a veto. They are countries with a long term interest in Syria, and I just categorically reject that the fact that Canada is not currently on the security council would make any difference in this situation.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Madam Chair, as I listen tonight, I think we are all extremely concerned about the tensions in Syria. We recognize that the potential is extremely high that the conflict will spill into other parts of the region.

We talked about human rights tonight, and my colleague was no different in his speech. He talked about absurdity, about the seat on the Security Council, yet we also have Rights and Democracy, which is a group that actually works very closely on the ground to help protect human rights.

Does he not think it is extremely absurd that the government, in a time of conflict in Syria, turns around and removes the funding to the very organization that is there to assist people in conflict like this?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Madam Chair, our government has made a significant number of statements concerning the violence in Syria from the very inception of that violence. In fact, we have been world leaders in speaking out against the Assad regime.

Beginning in March 21, 2011, the Minister of Foreign Affairs condemned the Assad regime and called for its resignation. We have made, to date, 15 condemnations of the Assad regime.

In terms of sanctions, in early May of 2011 the Prime Minister made a statement announcing targeted sanctions against members of the Assad regime. We followed that with eight escalating announcements about sanctions, each one greater than the last, in the hope that each one would cause the violence to cease and at the same time not hurt the people of Syria. Unfortunately, we have seen that these sanctions so far have not succeeded in ending the violence.

That just shows that we need to convince Russia, primarily, to move off its stand on Syria, and we need to support respect for human rights.

As the member will know, our government is creating the office of religious freedom. That would be very important to the people of this region. We must speak out in regard to the protection of all human rights, including religious freedom, and we hope we will see a new, democratically elected government that will make the protection of human rights and religious freedoms very important in that new government.

• (2105)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Chair, the Syrian community in Canada has repeatedly asked the government to come up with a formula to match funds, dollar for dollar, on what they raised.

Government Orders

Letters have been sent to the Minister of External Affairs as well as to members of the government, but there has been no response to date.

We have seen that the government reacted urgently in Haiti. The Prime Minister even made his own pledge at the Red Cross.

If we have done that with other countries, with Burma and with China, why is the government not doing it with Syria? Is it because there are not enough Syrians in Canada to make their vote worthwhile? Is it because the Conservatives are ignoring them? Is it because they do not know how to read letters?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Madam Chair, that last comment is the kind of absurd statement I would expect from that member.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Which comment—that you won't match dollar for dollar, or that you can't read?

Mr. Bob Dechert: He will know, if he chooses to look at the facts, that Canada was one of the very first countries to respond with humanitarian aid in Syria. In fact, our government started on March 12, 2011.

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the member who has just raised a question to wait till he is recognized before speaking, if he wants to be recognized again.

Mr. Bob Dechert: I appreciate that very much, Madam Chair.

With CIDA support, the Red Cross has distributed food and other essential items to 350,000 people and is providing emergency assistance and medical care for the wounded.

The Syrian Red Crescent Society has been able to distribute essentials to more than 60,000 people. The United Nations World Food Programme has provided food assistance to 235,000 people, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is assisting over 73,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, all with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Madam Chair, I was delighted to be in the House earlier this afternoon when the hon. member for Ottawa Centre moved the resolution on Syria and it was unanimously supported by the House. It was a great afternoon for all of the parties in the House to unanimously agree on a series of things that we as the Parliament of Canada can do to continue to exert the appropriate pressure through international agencies.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell us how important that is in our Department of Foreign Affairs when we are dealing with the UN or other international bodies to demonstrate that the Parliament of Canada is unanimously united behind resolutions with regard to the situation in Syria? Does it not make a huge difference in Canada's credibility that a unanimous resolution was passed by the House on the actions Canada and others should be taking?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Madam Chair, it is very important. Like him, I was very pleased earlier today when there was unanimous support by all members of the House for the resolution condemning the attacks on citizens in Syria and urging the Canadian government to continue to respond with humanitarian aid for refugees and internally displaced persons who are fleeing the violence in Syria. When we all speak with one voice, as we have here and in many other areas of

international affairs, our voice is, indeed, very loud around the world. I do hope that it will make a difference.

I would like to point out the last clause of the resolution that was agreed to earlier today, which is that we stand in solidarity with those who aspire for peace, democratic governance and the protection of human rights. As I mentioned earlier, fundamental among those in this region of the world is the protection of religious freedoms and religious minorities.

● (2110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Chair, tonight we are discussing the quite pressing situation in Syria, which seems to be getting worse by the day.

I would like to talk about the humanitarian situation in this country and in neighbouring countries, because this type of conflict always has repercussions on such countries. With the surge in violence in Syria, it appears that the humanitarian situation is on the same path as the civilians who are fighting for their survival.

According to a report issued on March 29 by the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, at least one million Syrians are in need of humanitarian aid. Given the events that have taken place in Syria over the past 14 months, one may suppose, without great fear of being mistaken, that the number of Syrians who are in need of humanitarian aid has increased. The report also indicates that protection, food, medical assistance, non-food items—such as bedding and essential items—and education are among the top priorities.

[*English*]

The Annan peace plan, which was agreed to by both sides in this conflict in March, included a point that specifically spoke to the humanitarian situation on the ground. It stated that all parties were to “ensure timely provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting, and to this end, as immediate steps, to accept and implement a daily two hour humanitarian pause and to coordinate exact time and modalities of the daily pause through an efficient mechanism, including at local level...”.

If the estimate I just mentioned is correct, we can still easily see the extreme importance of delivering that assistance as quickly and effectively as possible. Under the peace plan, there was only that two hour daily period to work with, which is obviously not ideal, but, if implemented properly, it would have allowed for the much needed supplies to get to those civilians in need. We cannot reasonably expect humanitarian aid to be delivered to those who need it if we do not ensure that the humanitarian corridors exist.

This is a point that our government must insist on at the United Nations. Our government also needs to push nations, like Russia and China that have been supportive of the Assad regime in the past, to pressure the regime to ensure that these humanitarian corridors are in place and safe. Without these corridors, it is very difficult to help those civilians in need in this crisis.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, it appears that the Annan plan is slowly falling apart at the seams. Based on what we have learned from a number of reports, Syria has been delaying the humanitarian assistance so desperately needed by the population. According to these reports, the Assad regime interrupted discussions on humanitarian aid because it demanded that an official Syrian organization be in charge of the delivery of humanitarian assistance. It is my understanding that the United Nations also asked to be in charge and wanted to be kept abreast of who was receiving humanitarian aid.

The United Nations' request was very reasonable and was consistent with what normally occurs in this kind of desperate situation. It is not reasonable to force civilians to seek basic humanitarian aid from the people who are shooting at them.

Many governments have offered assistance to people in need in this crisis. Turkey, Jordan, Libya and Iraq—neighbouring countries—have taken in Syrian refugees. The United Nations estimates that there are over 56,000 Syrian refugees registered in these countries, but the exact figure is probably even higher, because tens of thousands of people are not registered. It is estimated that, to date, Turkey alone has invested over \$150 million in refugee camps. A number of nations have rallied and are bearing this heavy burden. They must be thanked for the work that they have done to date and the work that they will undoubtedly do over the upcoming weeks.

● (2115)

Other major countries have also contributed assistance. For example, the United States recently provided Syria with additional humanitarian assistance to the tune of \$6.5 million, bringing the total amount of its emergency assistance to about \$40 million. Through CIDA, Canada is providing assistance in the amount of \$7.5 million, which includes the funds already announced by the government. Many other countries have also taken steps to come to the assistance of those in need.

Despite everything that has been done to date, the need in Syria remains great and the conflict still rages on. The question is this: what more can the international community in general, and Canada in particular, do about the humanitarian crisis in Syria? The answer to that question is complicated and there is no simple solution, we agree. Sending assistance to the communities most devastated by the conflict has been difficult and hazardous. In March, the Red Cross and Red Crescent finally managed to reach some of the most severely affected areas, such as Homs, Aleppo and Idlib. They provided emergency medical help and distributed thousands of food parcels, blankets and other items. However, although they succeeded in reaching those communities, others remain inaccessible and are still in need of assistance. It is largely for that reason that access to humanitarian assistance at all times is so critical; it is also for that reason that Canada should demand that such access be granted.

[*English*]

As I have already mentioned, Canada is delivering \$7.5 million in humanitarian aid to Syria. This is happening despite the fact that CIDA does not maintain a bilateral aid program in Syria. Most Canadian assistance to Syria is provided through CIDA's annual contributions to multilateral partners, such as the World Food Programme and UNESCO. With this being the case, Canada can

help the humanitarian cause in Syria by providing additional funding to these partners and other trusted NGOs. Canada could step forward by offering new funds for this humanitarian crisis, just as many other nations have.

[*Translation*]

Canada could also take innovative steps to increase its aid to the region, or consider measures taken previously under different circumstances, such as natural disasters. The government could match funds invested by reputable Canadian charities that are doing humanitarian work to help Syrians. That is what the government did when the tsunami devastated South-East Asia in 2004, and Canadians across the country donated \$132 million more as a result. Similarly, after the earthquake in Haiti, Canadians donated nearly \$129 million, which the government matched.

Those two examples illustrate how great things can be achieved when Canadians join forces to help others. Canada has never adopted such an approach in a case of armed conflict, but this could be a novel idea that would really help people in need. Reputable organizations like Red Cross and Red Crescent are already on the ground in Syria distributing aid. Canadians know and trust these organizations.

As mentioned, the government matched donations to Red Cross and Red Crescent following the tsunami in South-East Asia and the earthquake in Haiti to help those organizations carry out badly needed humanitarian work. I think it makes sense for us to ask ourselves whether we can do the same thing now for Syria.

In closing, I realize that this idea could raise issues and concerns that might prevent its execution. This may not be the best solution, but this example could point us to another solution. If this idea is feasible, it would be another way for us to provide international aid in situations like this one.

● (2120)

[*English*]

Tonight we all have had a great deal to say about this humanitarian crisis that is unfolding before our very eyes in Syria. Members of all parties in this House have brought forward their ideas, views and suggestions of how we can help. I have appreciated hearing what my colleagues have offered to this debate. I believe that we have a lot of good ideas in this place tonight to help us move forward.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his expression of concern for the people of Syria and for the refugees that this crisis is creating.

Government Orders

To enlighten those people who may be watching this debate, I would like to let them know how it is that Canada's humanitarian assistance in this crisis has been broken down. My colleague rightly mentioned that Canada has given \$7.5 million in humanitarian assistance for Syria. The breakdown is this: \$4 million have gone to the World Food Programme to meet emergency food needs in Syria; \$2.7 million have gone to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the care and maintenance of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and refugees and IDPs inside Syria; \$500,000 have gone to the International Committee of the Red Cross to meet the emergency needs of the conflict affected people in Syria; and \$300,000 have gone to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the improved effectiveness of humanitarian action in Syria.

Given that the capacity needs to be there to be able to use the money that Canada puts forward, does my colleague not think it prudent that Canada continue to assess the situation in coordination with its partners before we go making those kinds of decisions on other financial contributions?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Chair, in every given conflict and in every given situation, Canada has an obligation as a United Nations member state.

Canada has many obligations under international law, under the UN charter and so on and so forth. We have to assess every situation.

One of the things I would like to bring up and ask about is in the March 12 press release by the Minister of International Cooperation. I would like to read this into the record. She had this to say:

Humanitarian agencies in the area are working in a very insecure and highly dangerous environment. We continue to call for an end to the violence and for the immediate full, safe, and unhindered access for humanitarian agencies to those suffering as a result of this conflict.

I would like to know what the government has done so far, in terms of implementing measures or pressing for measures to be implemented, in order for aid to arrive at those in need in this crisis.

• (2125)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Chair, I just want to thank the hon. member for his thoughtful speech. I want to put to him the issue of Russia, which seems to be the major stumbling block to arriving at any kind of a solution with respect to President Assad or anything else with respect to Syria.

I would be interested in the member's thoughts with respect to why he thinks Russia seems to be so intransigent with respect to its attitude towards Syria. Does the member think Russia will actually diminish its influence in the Middle East with respect to its position on Syria?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Chair, that is an important question for people who have worked in the international fora for many years, as many of us have done, including myself and I say that very humbly.

There are a lot of issues that need to be considered here. One of the things that is very unfortunate in this debate, and members on the other side may say what they want and think what they think with respect to the international influence today, but the present government has no influence anymore and no credibility, whether

it is on the environment, climate change or the leadership role that we used to have and that Canadians were so proud of in this country.

We do not have that influence anymore. That is what is unfortunate in all of this. As my colleague from Ottawa Centre said earlier, we have an opportunity to pressure Russia. We have an opportunity to pressure Syria in the present context of negotiations for a free trade agreement.

However, what is going to be the result of the lack of influence, that influence we no longer have on the international stage? It is too bad.

We need to continue to uphold our international obligations under international law. We need to uphold those human rights that we pledge to promote and protect under our obligations as a member state of the United Nations under the UN charter. That is the only means we have presently.

What is the government doing to continue the pressure it should apply in this present situation?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like to ask my colleague the question I put earlier to the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale about the funding of Rights & Democracy. Of course, he did not answer the question. He talked about a lot of things, but he did not answer the question. However, he did say that the government is setting up another organization and funding it. I am wondering why we should close off an organization that already provides effective services and resources to countries undergoing major transformations.

I would like his comments on Rights & Democracy. The organization really is an excellent Canadian institution responsible for promoting the protection of human rights and democratic development. What does he think about the fact that the Conservative government has cut funding to that organization in its budget for this year?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

She raises an important question in the context of this conflict. One of the measures we must insist on in this conflict is that the regime in place must be replaced by a better regime, a more democratic regime, we hope.

The way things currently are in the world, we need to analyze our relationships with the autocratic regimes that exist. We have had relationships with certain autocratic regimes in the past, we continue to and, perhaps, we will have relationships with them in the future, as well. We need to review and analyze our behaviour internationally in that regard.

The hon. member mentioned the cuts to Rights & Democracy. This institution did extraordinary work and was respected throughout the world. I know something about it because I worked with them in Africa, South America, Latin America and in other places around the world. It is one of our Canadian institutions that was respected and that had a very good reputation throughout the world.

What did the Conservatives do? They eliminated the funding for this institution. That is unfortunate because it was one of the ways we had to try to help countries with questionable regimes. However, the Conservatives are eliminating every institution that goes against their decisions, philosophy and ideology. We see it everywhere, in all the programs that were important both in Canada and internationally.

● (2130)

[English]

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Madam Chair, to start, I would like to say that it grieves me that just two weeks ago we were standing here talking about another regime that was killing its own people, the Ahmadinejad regime in Iran. Unfortunately, we now find ourselves talking about another regime, this one led by Bashar al-Assad.

The appalling massacre in the Syrian town of Houla on May 25 and the subsequent attacks on the city by government forces are the latest tragic episodes in the Assad regime's campaign of repression against Syria's pro-democracy opposition.

In March of last year, when this region was still in the throes of unrest throughout the Arab world and into North Africa, a group of Syrian children painted anti-regime graffiti on the walls of a school in Daraa. Their subsequent detention and cruel torture sparked protests, which the regime attempted to quell by force. However, this only caused the demonstrations to grow and spread to other cities until people all across the country were peacefully demanding a free and democratic Syria.

The courageous and peaceful nature of these protests stands in stark contrast to the inhuman brutality of the Assad regime with its use of force against unarmed demonstrators, military assaults on civilian areas, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, summary executions, denial of medical treatment, torture and sexual violence, including against children.

As our Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs have said, the Assad regime has lost all legitimacy by killing its own people to stay in power. I could not agree more. One of the world's worst human rights tragedies is unfolding in Syria day in and day out, even as we speak here tonight.

In February, the United Nations Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry for Syria reported that there is reliable evidence that Syrian military officers and civilian officials at the highest levels are responsible for gross human rights violations.

In March, the United Nations confirmed a death toll of more than 9,000 over the first year of unrest.

In April, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that more than 65,000 Syrians had fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have also been internally displaced.

Canada is deeply concerned about the plight of ordinary Syrians affected by the unrest and has responded with humanitarian assistance to address the urgent needs arising from this crisis, which were well outlined by the parliamentary secretary earlier here tonight.

Government Orders

From the outset, the regime attempted to justify this relentless repression by painting an essentially peaceful pro-democracy movement as a violent threat. I do not know how Assad can try to get away with this when, as UNICEF has said, 400 children have been killed, and that is not including the current massacre, and another 400 have been imprisoned.

Assad's propaganda machine created a self-fulfilling prophecy. Faced with relentless repression, military defectors turned their weapons on the regime and formed what is now called the Free Syrian Army. They were joined by erstwhile civilians who took up arms to protect their communities. This has developed into an armed insurrection, although the Free Syrian Army remains decentralized and lacks substantial cohesion or a genuine command structure.

Since late last year, we have also witnessed the worrying spectre of several large-scale bombings in the previously calm urban centres of Damascus and Aleppo. Extremists, possibly linked to al-Qaeda, are taking advantage of the unrest to advance their own agendas. However, the regime remains directly responsible for the overwhelming majority of violence and has itself created the conditions that have driven some of its opponents to take up arms.

A resolution to the crisis has thus far proved elusive. Bashar al-Assad has gradually unveiled a series of purported reforms that have proven limited in both scope and implementation, while the actions of Syria's security forces belie any genuine commitment to such reforms.

The regime's limited constitutional reforms as well as the subsequent legislative elections, which were boycotted by the opposition, were farcical exercises in propaganda that lacked any credibility with Syria's pro-democracy forces or indeed anyone with an ounce of common sense. Meanwhile, the Syrian opposition is becoming more organized, but much remains to be done.

● (2135)

In addition to the grassroots groups organizing on the ground, such as the local coordinating committees, we have seen organizations such as the Syrian national council and a national coordinating committee establish themselves as umbrella organizations for opposition, both within Syria and throughout the diaspora.

Canada has been engaging Syria's peaceful, pro-democracy opposition since the crisis began and is providing support to pro-democracy actors. However, it is now imperative that the Syrian opposition come together and unify on a shared transition plan for a post-Assad Syria. We have also been urging the opposition to reach out to ethnic and religious minorities that are absolutely essential elements of Syrian society. The Syrian opposition must do this if it is to convince the Syrian people that it can be a viable alternative to the Assad regime.

Government Orders

The agreement of all parties to respect the ceasefire brokered by UN and the Arab League joint special envoy Kofi Annan, Syria's acceptance of the Annan peace plan and the recent deployment of the United Nations supervision mission in Syria have opened a small window of opportunity for peaceful political transition in Syria. However, the way ahead is fraught with peril and challenges are considerable. As the events in Houla demonstrated all too well, al-Assad leads a ruthless regime with little respect for its own people, let alone its own international commitments.

Acknowledging the frustration opposition supporters are feeling, given the continued violence and lack of progress in the political track, we continue to urge both parties to adhere to the peace plan before us. The Annan plan is the best option we have for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. It is the only alternative to an almost certain descent into chaos, increased violence and possible civil war. This would be a tragic outcome in which everyone concerned would suffer, most notably the Syrian people.

Canada urges the international community to seize this opportunity to ensure success of the Annan plan. We are providing \$250,000 in support of the joint special envoy and have imposed extensive sanctions against the Assad regime in order to push it to live up to its obligations. Along with our partners in the international community, we are working to apply concerted pressure on the Assad regime to step aside, end the violence and allow a genuine political transition to occur. We call upon the UN Security Council to strengthen these efforts by adopting binding international sanctions against the Assad regime. We urge countries with influence in Damascus to persuade Assad to immediately implement the Annan plan before more innocent Syrian lives are lost. The people of Syria can afford no further delay.

Mr. Tarik Brahmī (Saint-Jean, NDP): Madam Chair, I listened carefully to the member opposite's position and that of his party. I would like to ask him if, given the latest declaration of Mr. Gatilov, the deputy foreign minister for Russia, saying that it is not mandatory anymore to keep Assad in power, does the member think that it is an optimistic position that we can expect from that declaration?

• (2140)

Mr. David Sweet: Madam Chair, what would be optimistic is if Russia and China would join the rest of the UN Security Council and would not only condemn the actions of the Assad regime but would also, as I mentioned in my speech, take action to ensure that binding sanctions are placed upon him and also, rather than make a public statement, exert their influence upon that regime so al-Assad would step aside.

That is really going to be what encourages people, to show that there is some sincere effort being made to end this crisis. The Syrian people need it to happen today. There has been enough death and violence, as I mentioned, not only to the general population but to children as well. It boggles my mind that a regime would not only kill children but would actually arrest them and continue to torture them while this conflict continues.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Chair, I basically agree with the member's speech. I want to focus on the last part of his speech with respect to influence in Damascus, which seems to be rather scarce. That really is language for China

and Russia but primarily Russia, which has had historical influence in that part of the world.

I would be interested in my colleague's thoughts with respect to what he thinks could be done to persuade Russia to become more interventionist in the Assad regime. Could he tell me what is in it for Russia for it to be taking the position that it seems to be taking? At one level it does not make any sense.

Given that the balance of the Security Council, all 13 members, the entire Arab League, with the exception of Syria, and many more members of the UN agree that there should be some form of intervention, is it time for serious thought to be given to responsibility to intervene?

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, there are three countries that have serious influence in Damascus. One was mentioned earlier and that was Iran. It would be hopeless to think that Iran would do anything positive in this regard.

There is one motivation for Russia to act appropriately in this case. If it wants to establish itself as a real world leader, as a legitimate superpower, then it has to act accordingly. It needs to demonstrate that it can do this on an occasion like this where there is serious bloodshed. As I mentioned in my speech, unfortunately the next stage looks like it could be complete anarchy and civil war. Russia needs to step up to the plate and really assert all of the influence that it has to have Assad step aside.

As far as the responsibility to protect is concerned, whether it is the Arab League or any other nation, I like everybody else hope that there can be a diplomatic solution to this. In these cases we hate to think about the other options. However, if the killing continues, I am certain many people will be trying to think of other options of intervention to make sure that the killing stops.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to continue along the same line of questioning the member for Scarborough—Guildwood just initiated with regard to Russia. Surely one of the incentives for Russia to change its position on Syria is for it to be on the right side of history. Many countries in the world, not just Canada, have called for Assad to go. Many countries, not just Canada, have called for much stronger action by the Security Council.

Assad will go one day and this period of suffering for the Syrian people will be remembered as a dark chapter in the history of that country. If Russia is seen as having extended it for longer than it needed to be, that will not reflect well on it. Could the hon. member speak further to this point?

We all agree that the Annan peace plan is the only blueprint at the moment for progress that would help to protect civilians, that would help to alleviate the conflict. Would my colleague not agree that none of the six points have been implemented?

Government Orders

Faced with this situation almost three months after the formulation of the plan, would my colleague agree that there is no alternative but to call upon the Security Council to take much stronger action to compel compliance with the peace plan through stronger sanctions and other measures if necessary? Would he also not agree that if this does not take place it is not Canada or those members of the Security Council who welcomed stronger action who will bear the burden of responsibility?

It is Russia, China and other members of the Security Council, permanent and otherwise, who are standing against these measures. Would he not agree that we have a duty in the House and elsewhere to draw attention to the fact that they are preventing the actions that would speed up the alleviation of the suffering of the Syrian people?

• (2145)

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, my colleague was so eloquent, I do not know if I could add anything that would actually increase the eloquence or veracity of his statement.

If I look at the six points—to commit to work with the envoy, to commit to stop fighting and achieve urgently an effective United Nations supervised cessation, ensure the timely provision of humanitarian assistance, intensify the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons, ensure freedom of movement, and respect freedom of association—he is absolutely correct that none of these have been complied with in any way, shape or form.

As for his comment regarding Russia wanting to be on the right side of history, I would hope that every nation would want to be on the right side of history in this regard and would do everything possible. As my hon. colleague said, the one plan we have, the one road map, the one thing we can all agree on, that if we follow this plan we will end up with a cessation of violence and a path forward to a democratic nation, is the Annan plan, the six-point plan. This is certainly where Canada and all of its partners want to try to influence the Assad regime to end up at and I hope that would be the case with Russia as well in the near future.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am going to ask my colleague a question that I asked the member for Mississauga—Erindale earlier, who basically refused to answer it and went on about what he felt the government had done. That was with respect to Rights & Democracy.

The member for Mississauga—Erindale mentioned that although the government was not supporting Rights & Democracy anymore, it was supporting religious rights and freedoms and there is an organization in the process of being put together. Rights & Democracy has been a great Canadian institution and has been promoting human rights protection and democratic development. It is already familiar with the groundwork and has already proven that it can do the job. Why would the government cut the funding and undermine its capacity given the fact that we have seen over and over again, especially in the past few years, the crises that have been occurring in places like Syria?

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, if my hon. colleague thinks that if Rights & Democracy had been around it would have prevented this from happening, she has another thing coming. If my hon. colleague thinks that Rights & Democracy ever had a mandate to intervene in a catastrophic situation, she has another thing coming. This whole

notion that Rights & Democracy plays into this situation at all is absurd.

We are debating a very serious situation, a catastrophic event that continues to unfold and is victimizing the Syrian people. Bringing a partisan argument into this is more than foolish. It would be better left unsaid.

• (2150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Chair, the situation in Syria is serious and it seems that things are only getting worse, if the daily clashes in violation of the Annan plan are any indication.

The geopolitics in the Middle East have become a real powder keg in which the interests of the states are intermingling. Russia and China do not seem to want to co-operate and we are getting further and further from a peaceful solution, but we must not give up hope.

Canada has an honourable tradition as a reliable mediating power. That is often the lot of middle power countries that border the major geopolitical players of this world. It is an expertise of which we can be proud.

However, for several years, we have been seeing our international standing deteriorating. We could have been a mediator of choice at the UN Security Council to try to resolve the conflict in Syria, but we do not have as much clout as we once did, perhaps because our foreign policy is too focused on purely economic and self-serving interests.

Short-sightedness and a general withdrawal have been what we have been seeing since 2006. Canada appears only rarely on the international scene and has basically become disinterested in the outside world. For many Canadians the hardest blow was when we failed to obtain a temporary seat on the UN Security Council.

What kind of leverage do we have now? And what do we have to do? The Bashar al-Assad regime has lost all touch with reality. It strikes with impunity, it commits massacres and snubs its nose at the mediation attempts by the UN and the Arab League. And then came the bloodbath in Houla, as if to validate al-Assad's insanity and our powerlessness. Those who are old enough will remember the Markale massacre in Sarajevo, when the west decided to help the Bosnians under siege in Sarajevo.

However, Syria is not Bosnia-Herzegovina. We do not believe that there is a military solution to this conflict, and with good reason. For the time being, the efforts of Kofi Annan and the Arab League are our best hopes for resolving the conflict. If there is a solution out there, they will be the first to find it. We have to follow their progress closely, even if the process is long and cumbersome.

More specifically, what can Canada do? The answer is “little”, but “little” can still be useful.

Government Orders

Last week, Canada responded by following the example of European nations and expelling all Syrian diplomats. Literally, all ties with Damascus have been cut off. We have nothing to lose by severing those ties. Our interests in Syria are negligible. Syria is a weak economy that is barely staying afloat thanks to its nefarious and illegal tricks with unscrupulous countries that put up with the regime in Damascus in order to sell weapons and other basic amenities to third-world countries.

Despite a few timid attempts by the al-Assad regime since 2006 to liberalize the economy and encourage the growth of foreign investments, the results have been very disappointing. Encouraged by Turkey, whose economy and opportunities for the future are very optimistic, al-Assad tried to get a little closer to the west and seemed to want to play the game for a while. When the Arab Spring happened, it soon became very clear that we were dealing with an unscrupulous tyrant.

Since the uprising began, the Syrian economy—which was already faltering—has been in a free-fall. The country's domestic deficit has reached record lows. Syrians have lost all hope for their safety, their future and their honour, and are therefore either fighting or leaving.

According to some sources, 130,000 Syrian citizens have already fled the country to the four neighbouring states. If Canada must intervene, I think that is where we should focus our efforts.

Of all the countries that share a border with Syria, Turkey is the most directly affected by this civil war. The Turkish state was already deeply engaged with its neighbour from an economic and strategic standpoint. I am talking about Turkey's "zero problems with the neighbours" policy. The chaotic situation these days is creating challenging instability in the border regions and the Turkish government has to constantly adjust its position and struggle to restore order.

Among the pressing issues is the influx of refugees. About the Syrian refugees who choose to flee to Turkey, we have to seriously consider the following. First, we have to consider the welcome they receive once they reach the border. Then, we have to consider the real or perceived impact of their presence on Turkish soil. Finally, we have to consider the long-term consequences to displaced persons and the local populations. Those are three very important elements that speak volumes about what we can expect in the region in general. Let us start with the situation in Antioch.

There are currently 120,000 Syrian nationals in the Turkish province of Hatay, where the city of Antioch is located. The Turkish government has put up temporary facilities for many of them, people of all ages. However, many are young children who were attending school before they were forced to flee with their parents. For them to return home when things get back to normal, they have to be able to continue receiving their education in their language. There are also seniors who require medical supervision and drugs.

• (2155)

The local population is doing its best to manage the arrival of these Syrian families which, for the most part, must rely on the kindness of their hosts to survive.

Most of the people streaming towards Antioch originate from Aleppo, which is only a one-hour drive from the border. Many of these new arrivals are already familiar with the city because they have been there many times before. Consequently, some Syrians have moved to Antioch where they are trying to lead a normal life. Naturally, others are taking advantage of the freedom in Turkey and have engaged in political activism among their fellow citizens.

Antioch has a population of about 200,000. The arrival of so many refugees, long-standing neighbours or not, has been trying for all communities. Just imagine tens of thousands of poor and desperate Americans suddenly crossing the Detroit border and settling in Windsor. What would we do to give them the semblance of a normal life and the moral and social support they would need?

Turkey is one of Canada's allies and we should be sensitive to its needs in these difficult times. However, we must realize that the Syrian crisis has contributed to the destabilization of power in Ankara. We learned this lesson with Yugoslavia 20 years ago. When things happen suddenly, sleeping dogs are woken, and Turkish border areas are not immune to the ghosts of the past.

At one time, the Hatay province was the Sandjak of Alexandrette, and its transfer to Turkey under the Treaty of Lausanne, soon after the end of the Great War, was strongly challenged by Syrians. Indeed, 100 years ago, the province was very predominantly Arab. We can imagine that the massive influx of Syrian refugees is stirring century-old fears and ethnic disputes. That is precisely the kind of disputes where logic and quiet reasoning account for very little.

This brings us to a potentially much more serious problem.

Everyone knows that the Kurdish issue is the most problematic and important one for Ankara. The Kurds form the largest ethnic minority in Turkey. There are between 13 million and 18 million of them and, in the past, that relation has often degenerated into violence. We must think about the potential exodus of the 2 million Kurds from northern Syria to Turkish Kurdistan. Ankara quickly anticipated the potential risks and, again, this threat, perceived or real, is the prime reason why the Turkish government is engaging into very active diplomacy.

However, after cutting ties with Damascus, Assad, who now knows he has his back to the wall and who no longer owes anything to his former friend, made concessions to the Kurdish labour party, the PKK. So, there is really a worrisome Kurdish dimension and its impact could be catastrophic. Let us not forget that, as in Yugoslavia at the time, Syria is lacking everything except weapons. The combination of all these conditions could create a perfect storm. Canada must always keep that in mind in the days to come. We must support our Turkish ally, but we must also be aware that it is under great pressure.

Here is my understanding of the dynamics at Syria's northern border. I do not want to sound like a doom and gloom bird, but if even Turkey can feel some destabilizing effects, just imagine what could happen west of that country, in Lebanon.

Government Orders

That country is well-known for the fragility of its multifaith social contract, and everyone is familiar with the long civil war that literally ravaged it during the 1970s and 1980s. Syria's ethnic and religious make-up is similar to Lebanon's. Incidentally, that country has historically been part of the Syrian cultural mosaic. However, because of the tragic events of the 20th century, the relation between these two modern entities has deteriorated, and their political destiny is now separated.

If Syrian nationals go into the mountains of Lebanon, it could reopen old wounds. Even this week, the conflict seemed to echo Tripoli, where there were confrontations. This is extremely worrisome, because you would need eyes in the back of your head to measure the impact. There are weapons stockpiles everywhere and there are old, hardened hatreds. If civil conflict were to suddenly resurface in Lebanon, we would be taking a 30-year step backward.

Need I add that if Lebanon were destabilized, Israel would be next in line to be affected?

The Syrian civil conflict is probably a powder keg. If the Middle East were to flare up in every direction, we would need to be ready. Fortunately, it has not yet happened. It is essential to seriously consider the risks before us. Diplomatic efforts need to be redoubled, and if this means through Moscow, then we will go to Moscow.

However, I wish to remind you that if Canada wants its involvement to be effective, meaning able to control part of the chaos, it will be by helping its allies in the region to remain calm along their borders. We need to deploy generous efforts to help those who are fleeing from violence. We need to do everything possible to limit the damage being inflicted by Assad's tyrannical and criminal regime.

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I recently had the opportunity to travel with my colleague to the Ukraine. I found her a very interesting and delightful travel companion when we were there with the foreign affairs committee. I know she is a thoughtful person.

I have heard her comments about Russia tonight and what the international community should do to put pressure on it. We have heard about free trade.

Could she go beyond that and tell me if she is suggesting that perhaps Canada and other countries should contemplate some kind of economic sanction against Russia if it does not the right thing with respect to Syria?

• (2200)

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his question. I very much appreciated my recent trip with him and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. It was extremely interesting.

As for Russia, it is absolutely critical for Canada to play a leadership role and to make every possible effort to have Russia play a much more active role in the current conflict and for it to take very clear steps to stop the Assad regime.

It is difficult to understand Russia's current position and its Security Council veto. It is truly important for Canada to play a leadership role on this front.

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have two questions for the hon. member.

First, this situation started in January 2011, a year and six months ago. Along the way a request was made for us to have an emergency debate and members of her party declined it. That request was made on October 18, 2011. What has changed from now till then, that her party assumes we should have the debate now but not back then?

Second, she said, “the Middle East is a powder keg and we need to be ready”. That is her statement word for word. What exactly does she mean by that? Does she mean ready to go to war? Does she mean boots on the ground, military intervention? Could she please explain that for me?

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Chair, first of all, I do not know exactly how it was translated, but in what I said, it was very clear that the current situation in Syria and its neighbouring countries is extremely complex.

It is very important to take action in a calm and measured manner, because it is not simple. It is complicated. Everything that happens there has immense repercussions on the whole surrounding region. It is truly a very sensitive situation. That is what we must keep in mind every time we discuss this conflict.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Chair, I warmly congratulate my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent on his speech.

In conflicts like the one in Syria, international law requires ongoing and constant protection for non-combatants. Turkey's role in this conflict has been mentioned this evening on several occasions. Turkey is currently taking in a lot of refugees. To date, Turkey has spent over \$150 million on refugee camps.

Will my colleague elaborate on her ideas on this issue? Should Canada play a more important role in this specific situation? What role are the neighbouring countries playing in this conflict?

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for his question.

As usual, he has a firm grasp of the issues and the difficulty with which we are faced.

He is completely right. This is an area upon which Canada should focus its efforts and try and help civilian refugees as much as possible. We can do this and, at the end of the day, it is consistent with the absolutely crucial objective of protecting civilians and people who should not have to bear the negative impacts of this kind of conflict. Yet, we know that this is often what happens. It is these people who pay the biggest price when these conflicts break out.

Yes, Canada should get much more actively involved and try and help with the refugee camps in the neighbouring countries, and help these people.

Government Orders

• (2205)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank our honourable colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for her speech. Her very perceptive regional overview demonstrated a clear understanding of the situation and great concern for the neighbouring countries in the region that have already been heavily affected by this conflict.

On this side of the House, we intend to continue to develop a Canadian policy on Syria that takes into account the challenges faced by our allies, our partners in the region, and that supports them as they come to grips with the growing disarray stretching out beyond Syrian borders.

Does she not agree, however, that the most destabilizing factor, the factor which is most likely to leave the Syrian population without protection, is the actions of the Assad regime, and the presence of this individual at the head of the Syrian state? Does she not agree that despite the efforts being made in the region to help neighbouring countries deal with the situation, Canada's priority must be measures to force Assad to relinquish power, and to increase pressure from the international community so that the Kofi Annan action plan can be implemented?

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his question. I have great admiration for him. I know that he clearly understands this issue. In comparison, I still have a long way to go before I will be able to grasp it all.

I think he raises a key point. We think it is very important to reiterate that we fully support the special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League. It is of the utmost importance that the United Nations continue its concerted efforts. I think that this is where Canada and its allies should focus the efforts that the international community is prepared to make in order to resolve the situation. It is true that Assad's continued presence certainly undermines efforts to find a solution.

I really think that it is through the United Nations that this problem will ultimately be resolved.

[*English*]

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Madam Chair, it is my pleasure to rise this evening to participate in this very important and timely debate.

From the beginning of the conflict in Syria, Canada has taken a firm and unequivocal stance denouncing the violence against civilians. Sadly, this is violence all too frequently perpetrated by the regime itself against its own people.

The government, with the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, is committed to supporting the Syrian people in their aspirations for freedom, the full exercise of fundamental rights, the rule of law and representative government.

This conflict springs from the frustrations of people who for decades have been deprived of good government and proper outlets for their dreams and aspirations.

Canada supports Kofi Annan's efforts to mediate a political solution to the crisis. Mr. Annan's six-point plan offers steps to addressing the needs and aspirations of Syrians. Therefore, the government strongly supports the work of the UN supervision mission in Syria, which is monitoring and reporting on adherence to Annan's six-point peace plan. That is the focus of my remarks this evening.

The Annan plan demonstrates the international will to support a peaceful political transition in Syria. It lays out a basic framework for that process.

As members may recall, Mr. Annan is acting not only as special envoy of the UN Secretary General but also as the special envoy of the Secretary General of the Arab League. I note this in order to stress that the plan has strong regional backing in the Middle East in addition to the global support of the international community.

The goal of the plan is to bring about an inclusive Syrian-led transition to a democratic state, one that represents human rights and lives in peace with its neighbours. Canada has contributed \$250,000 to Mr. Annan's work as envoy, a concrete expression of our support for this process.

Unfortunately, despite its commitments to date, the Syrian regime has shown bad faith by failing to implement the terms of the Annan plan. It has failed to withdraw its military services from populated areas and it has failed to respect the ceasefire.

The horrific massacre in Houla on May 25 confirms the current Syrian regime's apparent contempt for international law and its seeming disdain for the safety and rights of civilians.

We hold President Assad and his government accountable for the deaths of the 108 victims, 49 of whom were children. We hold them accountable for attacks carried out by the Syrian army and the so-called shabiha militias of pro-government thugs. The fact that civilians are deliberately killed through artillery shelling and close-range executions is shocking and shameful, and that it is done on the orders of their own government is a monstrous crime.

In order to respond to this crisis, the international community must draw on many tools. We must work incrementally by offering a variety of incentives and exerting various forms of pressure on those responsible for the violence in order to stop it.

Canada has imposed eight rounds of sanctions against the Assad regime. These sanctions deliberately target Assad and his allies instead of the people of Syria. They increase the pressure on Assad to end the violence as quickly as possible. Many of our key allies, including members of the Arab League, have imposed similar sanctions. However, gaps remain. We are urging all members of the international community to join us in imposing similar measures. In particular, the time has come for the UN Security Council to fulfill its responsibilities and impose binding sanctions against Syria for the sake of international peace and security. Only in this way can we truly ensure that the Assad regime does not have access to the resources and means to continue its campaign of terror, death and destruction.

Government Orders

Despite the challenges, more than ever the channels of communication between all parties to the Syrian conflict must remain open. For that reason, we must give Mr. Annan every opportunity to continue to fulfill his mission as envoy.

● (2210)

The UN supervision mission in Syria is a tool for pressuring the parties to seek a solution while containing the violence. An international presence within Syria helps to hold the regime and others accountable for their acts of violence. The work of the mission gives unbiased assessment of the facts on the ground, preventing the Assad regime from hiding behind lies and misinformation.

Make no mistake, it will be held accountable. The UN observers are performing critical tasks by witnessing, recording and testifying to the degree of compliance with the Annan plan. They monitor the cessation of violence. They report from the field on whether and how the parties are adhering to the ceasefire, whether and how the Syrian army continues to use heavy weapons in populated areas and whether or not the military services have returned to their barracks.

The supervision mission reporting confirms for the international community whether or not the parties to the conflict are permitting access to humanitarian relief. They detail whether journalists have freedom of access and whether the population has the freedom to assemble. Their regular reports to the Security Council contribute to informed decision making. They help to corroborate and flesh out testimony from other sources as to the regime's behaviour.

Major General Mood, the UN supervision mission commander, has noted publicly that his team of observers are uncovering execution-style mass killings, calling the practice appalling and inexcusable.

The supervision mission reports from Houla make it clear that Assad's forces are responsible for this latest slaughter.

The Security Council mandated an observer mission, not an enforcement mission, as the mission's personnel are there to observe conditions, but they are unarmed. They are not mandated to use force either to protect themselves or to protect others.

The security situation in the country has deteriorated since April when the UN first authorized this mission. There have been too many reports of aggression towards UN supervision mission observers, including an improvised explosive device attack and direct fire against a convoy on May 15.

The security of the mission's personnel is the responsibility of the host government, yet these incidents show that the Assad regime is again failing to meet its commitments. As a result, and given the volatility of the situation on the ground, we cannot now consider deploying Canadian Forces personnel.

We will continue, however, to track conditions closely as the mission evolves. In the meantime, we call on the Syrian authorities to fulfill their responsibilities by ensuring the safety and access of the UN observers, so that the mission can do its work.

The supervision mission continues to do invaluable work. We do not want to see this work pre-empted or cut short. However, special envoy Annan has said that the conflict is now at a tipping point.

Furthermore, Mr. Annan has repeatedly stated that while his plan does not have a fixed timetable, it is not entirely open-ended. In his assessment, the international community must debate taking further action sooner rather than later. Mr. Annan has called on President Assad to take bold steps to end the crisis, and he has called on all parties to stop the violence immediately.

We echo Mr. Annan's calls, as action is needed urgently. This is why Canada is pressing members of the UN Security Council to adopt binding sanctions. It is time for the council to stand up, take action and tell Assad that his actions will not be tolerated by the global community.

The Syrian regime's allies must recognize that now is the time for them to pressure the regime to end the crisis before the situation deteriorates even further into chaos and more bloodshed. Canada continues to work with members of the Security Council to ensure that the Syrian regime is held accountable for its acts.

We will work to ensure that all parties to the conflict cease to use violence. Canada is working to help the Syrian people achieve the political transition for which they have already sacrificed so much.

● (2215)

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Chair, I listened carefully to the speech by the member for Mississauga South. She mentioned a few times that binding sanctions should be adopted by the Security Council.

I wonder which precise examples of binding sanctions could be effective, useful and efficient in that specific situation?

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Chair, when we are talking about binding sanctions and specifically the UN Security Council, it can take the lead from Canada. In fact, we have taken it upon ourselves to lead the charge in condemning the human rights violations. We have done this by eight rounds of sanctions. We have prohibited Syrian imports, expelled all Syrian diplomats, banned all new investments and frozen the assets of as many individuals and entities associated with the government as possible.

This is, in the same way, how we are calling upon the Security Council to join Canada, the EU, the Arab League and the U.S. in terms of binding sanctions, because sanctions essentially handcuff the Syrian regime. We are trying to do it in a way that does not harm the Syrian people or get in the way of the humanitarian efforts. We feel that if the Security Council were on side, the situation would improve. That is why we are calling for those binding sanctions.

● (2220)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will focus on one part of the hon. member's speech, and that has to do with the utility of the UN monitoring mission.

Government Orders

Its members are unarmed, of course, and that is appropriate. They are being somewhat manipulated by the Assad regime as they are sent here but not there and in various other ways. They are also bearing witness to some serious atrocities and arguably being used by the Assad regime to the point where they are almost complicit, though that is not the right word, in the atrocities that are being perpetrated on the population. On television we have actually seen pictures, signs and statements by the victim population saying to the UN, "Please don't come anymore; you're actually making it worse for us".

I would be interested in the member's thoughts as to the utility of continuing with the UN mission in its present format.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Chair, it is not a perfect solution, but Canada does support the Annan six-point plan, because at this point it is a tool. It is what we have to pressure the parties to seek a solution while containing the violence as much as possible.

It is true that the pressure has to come on the Assad regime from all angles. It has to come from sanctions, it has to come from the UN Security Council, and it has to come in a positive way. That is how I see the Annan plan. It is a positive—meaning unbiased—boots-on-the-ground kind of assessment that holds the regime's feet to the fire, in that Assad cannot tell the world that everything is fine if the envoy and his people are on the ground saying that the ceasefires are not being observed or people are not being allowed to assemble or refugees are not being allowed to leave the country.

Without that kind of information, countries like Canada could not make the decisions they are making, decisions that go a long way toward changing the situation, and neither could the UN Security Council.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Chair, what is the member's view of the opposition in Syria? Who are they and whom do they represent?

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Chair, the Syrian National Council is the opposition to the Assad regime. I am sure the member knows that it has been working on its outreach efforts and that Canada supports the Syrian National Council. We are prepared to work with its members because we believe they want democracy and freedom, as do we, for the Syrian people. They want the violence to end and so do we. We stand with all Syrian people in their fight for democracy and freedom. We believe that all countries deserve the human rights that we take for granted sometimes here in Canada.

Syria in particular has suffered at the hands of Assad and his regime. For that reason, we are supporting the efforts of the Syrian National Council.

• (2225)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the difficulties in Syria started in January 2011, and 10 months later, in October 2011, I put forward a request for a unanimous motion that read as follows:

That this House condemn the brutal attacks on members of the Syrian movement for democratic change and accountable government by the Bashar al-Assad regime; call on Bashar al-Assad to meet the Arab League 15-day deadline to enact a ceasefire and begin a dialogue between government officials and opposition representatives; accept the United Nations Human Rights Council's commission for inquiry into the violence of Syria to find out exactly what happened and to put an end to civilian

deaths; and, ensure that the perpetrators of these attacks are brought to justice and bear the full weight of the law.

That was in October 2011. I would ask the member, what has changed from then until now? Today the government has asked for an emergency debate, but we could not have that debate back in October 2011. What has changed is that after all this time, inaction from the government has brought more killing to the people in Syria.

Why is the government not listening to the requests of the Canadian Syrian people? They are asking CIDA to match dollar for dollar the money that they are raising in order to look after their loved ones in Turkey, Lebanon and other countries.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Chair, I find the partisanship demonstrated by this question a little disappointing. It is extremely important for us to stand together as one country in Canada, and I think all sides in this House agree.

The government has acknowledged for many months now that the problems in Syria are serious. We have been taking action, including sanctions and humanitarian aid to the tune of \$7.5 million or so.

More importantly, I draw to members' attention the motion that was passed unanimously earlier today by this House, because it covers many different areas of this conflict. I think that when Canada passes a motion like this, the world listens because we are united and we are a strong country.

We are condemning the brutal massacre and calling for an immediate end to the violence. We support the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syrian Crisis. We are calling on Syria's government to allow the people to access the media. We have expelled our Syrian diplomats. We call on the leadership of China and Russia to play an active and decisive role. We confirm our support for humanitarian aid to the refugees and the victims. We stand in solidarity with those in Syria who aspire to peace, a democratic government and protection of human rights.

I think, frankly, that says a lot about Canada and about the fact that we are willing to rise above partisanship in this House for the betterment of the people in Syria.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am thankful for the opportunity to add a few thoughts to this important debate. I am splitting my time with the member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

In preparing for this evening's debate, I had opportunity to speak with representatives of the Christian community, the Druze community, the Turkish community and a few others as well. I am quite grateful for their contributions to my thinking. It is important for Canadians, particularly MPs, to listen to what the diaspora communities have to say. I appreciate the diaspora communities sometimes have their own agendas. Nevertheless, it is useful in informing us as MPs so that we, in turn, can contribute to the formulation of government policy particularly with respect to an issue as serious as Syria.

Government Orders

While by no means unanimous, the communities that I spoke to had one clear message. Bear in mind that these are minority communities. The one clear message is that President Assad must go. Their opinion was based upon real life experience. Many of them are recent immigrants from that part of the world and being in some instances from minority communities can easily relate to stories where their own families have been subjected to persecution. They have, in the phrasing of refugee language, well-founded apprehension and fear based upon persecution for religion, ethnicity or race. It does not take a great deal of prompting to get them to tell stories, frequently horrific ones, of how they have been subjected to violence, frequently murders in the family and sometimes property confiscation.

The May 15 issue of the *R2P Monitor* states, “Threats to the safety and security of Alawites, Kurds, Christians and other minorities complicate the prospects for a peaceful resolution of the conflict”. Canadians need to bear that in mind, as does the government. I am sure the government is cognizant of the fact that the minorities have well-founded fear of majority rule. Their concern is that in the event that Mr. Assad leaves and is replaced, the question is, replaced with what?

The atrocities that are happening in Syria have been well documented and spoken to by other members this evening. I do not propose repeating what has already been said, but I want to add my voice and the voice of my constituents to the demand that President Assad step down. I would say to President Assad, “The objective international community has made and documented its observations and condemns your atrocities against your own people. You, sir, should leave and you should leave now.” In looking forward to the next steps that we should take in this conflict, I am particularly grateful to my colleague from Mount Royal for his insightful analysis and call to action.

Let me conclude on the point that I raised in questions, and that is the role of Russia. The key to the resolution of this conflict is Russia. I, frankly, do not understand why Russia takes the position it does. It has had a historical position on the Middle East and it is a position that everyone knows about. It goes back to colonial times. It has ports in Syria. I have no idea why Russia continues to take its position, particularly its position with respect to the alienation of the remainder of the Arab League. The Arab League is unanimous in the view that Assad must go.

• (2235)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Scarborough—Guildwood for his thoughtful comments. I know he has been here for many years and has participated in many debates. He is a very thoughtful man and I always appreciate his comments. I especially appreciated his comments about what might come next and his concerns about the protection of minority rights and religious freedoms, in particular.

I wonder if he would expand a little on that and refer to the resolution that was passed earlier today, which says that we all stand in solidarity with those who aspire for peace, democratic governments and, of course, protection of human rights. I wonder if he would expand a little on the protection of universal rights of religious freedoms under article 18 of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights and how he would expect the international community to assist in the protection of those very important rights in the next government of Syria.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Chair, this is where kind of the rubber hits the road with respect to the protection of religious rights.

In my conversations with the diaspora communities, they were virtually unanimous in the one thing that they thought Canada could do. The one thing that they said Canada could do was stand up for human rights and the rule of law. That was, so to speak, the one take-away above all other take-aways. It is interesting that, as a series of diaspora communities, that is what they see as the shining beacon of Canada. Within that universe of human rights, clearly religious rights are the rights that are probably as important, if not more important, to the Alawites, the Druze, the Christians and the Shia minorities. We cannot actually pick and choose among our rights and, in this particular conflict, religious rights are probably the paramount of all rights.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Chair, this evening, I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the speeches that we heard in this debate, and my colleagues on the government side will find me almost reassured. It is important that the entire community remain calm and avoid trying to be cowboy heroes who ride to the rescue, bring the massacre to an end and sort everything out in one fell swoop.

Whenever I hear the expression R2P, the responsibility to protect, I break out in a cold sweat. It makes me think of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Libya: there was a great success. There are still tanks blocking the airport in the capital and the problems are far from being resolved. It is important that we remain calm and restrained right to the end. This is how things will be resolved.

The only fear I have has nothing to do with what the international community is not doing, but rather with what might happen if it sends in troops. This would really sound the death knell for the Syrian people. They would be facing a real war and seeing their country destroyed and its infrastructure ravaged. That is the real danger. I hope that the members of the government will pursue the wise course they have followed until now.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Chair, I do not know that was actually a question directed to me since I am not a government member.

However, I would agree with him in the sense that it is time for prudence and for caution. As horrific as the situation is in Syria where tens or dozens or hundreds of people are being killed on a daily basis, an imprudent intervention, a heavy-handed intervention or an inappropriate intervention could turn hundreds into thousands killed on a daily basis. This is a very difficult situation.

Therefore, when we are contemplating an RtoP, a Responsibility to Protect, there is a whole cascading series of interventions. I encourage the government to go through it in a kind of disciplined fashion so that, as each stage gets reached, the pressure on the al-Assad regime gets ratcheted up. However, I do not know that we are actually at the point where we would actually intervene on an armed basis.

Government Orders

● (2240)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is almost 16 months since things happened in Syria. In January 2011, a series of protests began in Syria. Among other things, Syrian protesters called on the Syrian president and his government to bring in political reforms and stronger protection of civil rights. It was the beginning of the Arab Spring. Sixteen months later, we have a situation in Syria in which it is not any longer spring, but deep winter.

I mentioned in this House earlier tonight that in October 2011—October 18, as a matter of fact—I asked for unanimous consent for a motion to be passed. We asked for a motion for an emergency debate to be passed, and neither one of them flourished.

I even wrote to the minister on August 19, 2011, enclosing a letter from the Syrian Canadian Council, at which time they were asking the Canadian government to do the following:

1. Ensure that Canadian companies, such as Suncor Energy Inc., are not funding the present Syrian regime;
2. Call for a Conference of members of the Syrian Diaspora and others who were interested in developing a free and democratic Syria;
3. Offer to host the Conference in Canada under the auspices of the Canadian Government and assist with the funding of the Conference;
4. Expel the Syrian Ambassador to Canada; and,
5. Consider recalling the Canadian Ambassador to Syria.

That was August 2011, and to date I have not heard from the minister, not even a whisper and not even a return email. We did get a receipt that the minister did read it.

However, the Canadian-Syrian diaspora is asking for much more. They and our party as well have asked that CIDA match dollar for dollar whatever the community raises in order to help their loved ones back in places like Turkey, Libya and Jordan where they have fled, but again, nothing from the government.

There are people who have come to this country and have claimed refugee status for what is happening back in Syria. There are Syrians who were here in Canada before the atrocities started and have claimed refugee status, yet the government is not saying, “Yes, go ahead; we will accept your claim”. Instead people have to resort to courts, and courts are refusing their applications.

I even got an email this evening from a young man who is in Canada, Mike Wise. It states, “Today my house in Aleppo City was under fire and the Syrian army destroyed more than three buildings beside where my mom and sisters live. More than 44 people died under fire.”

The atrocities are perpetrated by the government of Syria, the Assad regime. It is not the first time he has done it, and his father did it before him. These atrocities need a quick response, and the quick response is that we should not have waited 16 months after it started to have a debate in this House.

The Government of Canada issues press release after press release, but has done absolutely nothing else except to address the situation. The Syrian community of Canada has asked the government to match dollar for dollar. We do not have a crisis on our hands of the kind we did in Haiti, and the Prime Minister is not going to go to the

Red Cross and give money. It does not really matter, so the government is not listening.

The accountability has to start right here, tonight. The member for Mississauga South, I believe, says we must, and I will repeat the words, “be held accountable”. I think the Canadian people and the Syrian diaspora in Canada are holding us all accountable, especially the government, because the government waited for 16 months to have the Syrian debate in the House, has not answered the diaspora's calls for action and certainly has not answered its calls to match dollar for dollar, which is what they are asking.

The minister of immigration is not assuring the community that we will take seriously their calls to stay in Canada and to be protected. He is not taking it seriously by telling the courts or his bureaucrats to stop deporting people or to not to turn their claims away.

The accountability should start in this House. It should start right here, today, and the government especially has to be held accountable. It has waited long enough, and this is why things are as bad as they are in Syria.

● (2245)

Accountability should start in the House and it should start right here today. The government has to be held accountable. It waited long enough and that is why things are as bad as they are in Syria.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I listened to the speech by the member for Scarborough—Agincourt and I listened to some questions he asked earlier this evening in what I must say was a typically belligerent and, regrettably, partisan fashion when we are having a debate about humanitarian atrocities that are happening in Syria and all members of Parliament are speaking with one voice here tonight. We put forward a unanimous resolution earlier today that was quite toughly worded. I think Canadians are listened to abroad when they speak reasonably with one voice and not in a partisan fashion.

I want to respond to a question that he asked of me earlier tonight. He asked me if we had received a letter from him or from others requesting matching dollar for dollar contributions. I checked with the staff of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and there is no record of such a request having been received. The minister has met with the Syrian community on multiple occasions across Canada. I have met with the Syrian community in the GTA. I have not heard that request. It has not been put forward in any media article that we are aware of.

I would ask that member to hand me the letter right now and I will take it directly to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and we will respond. I noticed that he was referring to his notes earlier so I assume he has it there. If he does not deliver it by the end of this debate tonight, I will assume that in typical fashion he has just fabricated that information and such a letter does not actually exist.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, the letter is right here. I even read it and I will read it again. I hope the member will listen carefully, as he has absolutely not listened. The letter reads:

They are asking the Canadian government to do the following:

1. Ensure that Canadian companies, such as Suncor Energy Inc., are not funding the present Syrian regime;

Government Orders

2. Call for a Conference of members of the Syrian Diaspora and others who are interested in developing a free and democratic Syria;
3. Offer to host the Conference in Canada under the auspices of the Canadian Government and assist with the funding of the Conference;
4. Expel the Syrian Ambassador to Canada; and,
5. Consider recalling the Canadian Ambassador to Syria.

That is the letter that the community has sent. This was sent by email to the minister on August 19, 2011. Our party has issued press releases asking for dollar to dollar contributions—

Mr. Bob Dechert: There is no mention of matching contributions. You made it up. You fabricated—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, the member had his opportunity to speak but, as usual, in every fashion he does not allow others to speak and in every fashion he is very belligerent.

If I have unanimous consent, I will table the letter.

The Deputy Chair: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the letter?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Chair: The member has about 30 seconds left in his answer.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, in government fashion, it will not stand up and take responsibility. In government fashion, it sweeps everything under the rug. In government fashion, it puts out press release after press release, which means nothing. The government does not consult with the community.

The community asked for it and it asked me to put it in writing. It was put in writing to the minister, and the minister has not responded. It is very unfortunate. I will make sure that I send it to his personal email, which I believe is p.9, which has been used frequently by others.

• (2250)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Chair, I guess I am doing cleanup here tonight. I believe this will be the last address tonight. It gives me great pleasure in some ways, but obviously concern in others, to rise in the House to participate in this take note debate.

For more than a year now, the Assad regime has been perpetrating unspeakable atrocities against its own people, against citizens who have done nothing more than to courageously demand their freedom and democratic rights. This barbarism has shocked the international community, provoking widespread condemnation of Assad and pushing many countries to take action to help resolve the crisis.

Canada has played an active role in these efforts and we are working with our partners and allies around the world to help stop the ongoing and horrendous violence in Syria. The tragic deaths of so many people, and especially children, in the May 25 Houla massacre only reinforces the need for the international community to work together to resolve this crisis before more lives are lost.

Throughout the crisis, the Arab League has played a key role, proving that it can make important contributions to regional peace.

Its members have repeatedly condemned the violence in Syria and the Assad regime's brutal repression of its own people. Arab League Secretary General Nabil El-Arabi and several member states have repeatedly attempted to mediate between the government and the opposition, only to see their efforts rebuffed by Damascus.

While long dismissed as a talking shop that was incapable of taking action, the Arab League has in fact taken forceful action repeatedly during the Syrian crisis. It suspended Syrian membership in the Arab League, a nearly unprecedented step and a shocking blow to the regional prestige of the Assad regime that has long prided itself for being the beating heart of Arabism. It has called on Arab states to impose sanctions against Syria and it has developed peace plans to help resolve the crisis. In support of their efforts, the Arab League deployed a monitoring mission to Syria, only to be confronted, yet again, by the refusal of the Assad regime to honour its pledges, making the work of the monitors both impossible and pointless as the military operations against the opposition continued despite their presence.

The Arab League now continues to work to resolve the crisis in partnership with the United Nations. The two organizations have appointed Kofi Annan as their Joint Special Envoy to Syria and he has developed a six-point peace plan that remains, in our view, the best hope for a peaceful political solution to the conflict.

The six-point plan, which calls for a ceasefire to be monitored by UN observers that would pave the way for a Syrian-led political transition, has been endorsed by the UN Security Council, the Arab League, the Assad regime itself and countries around the world, including our own. Once more, however, Assad is refusing to fulfill his commitments and the violence is continuing throughout Syria, unfortunately even as we speak.

Canada has and will continue to call on all parties to immediately implement the ceasefire and on the Assad regime to fully respect its obligations under the Annan plan. It is now all too obvious that Assad will not do this voluntarily.

• (2255)

Therefore, we urge the UN Security Council to adopt binding sanctions against the Assad regime in order to force him to stop the violence before he has time to slaughter even more innocent people. Those countries that have influence on Syria must now wield it to convince Assad that he must implement the Annan plan now while he still has the chance to do so.

The international community has also responded to the Syrian crisis in various other ways. The UN Human Rights Council has repeatedly condemned the systematic violations of human rights carried out by the Syrian forces during their operations against peaceful protestors demanding their legitimate democratic rights.

The Human Rights Council established a commission of inquiry to investigate the allegations of human rights abuses, and despite a complete lack of co-operation from the Syrian government, it has amassed a substantial body of evidence demonstrating that the Assad regime has committed crimes against humanity. Canada continues to support the work of the Human Rights Council, including sponsoring last Friday's special session in Geneva where the council adopted a resolution condemning the Houla massacre.

Government Orders

Syria has also featured prominently on the agenda of the G8 during the past year, most recently during last month's Camp David leaders' meeting. All G8 countries, including Canada, reiterated their support of the Annan plan and called on the Syrian government to immediately and fully implement all of the plan's provisions, including the immediate cessation of all violence.

Beyond these long-established bodies, international action on Syria has also resulted in the creation of the Friends of the Syrian People group, which has thus far gathered together more than 80 countries that are committed to helping the Syrian people achieve the democratic future that they are struggling for so valiantly. The friends have met twice since February, once in Tunis and once in Istanbul, and will meet again in July in Paris. Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs attended both of these meetings, as well as the April 19 foreign ministers meeting of the core members of the group.

In addition, several smaller working groups have met to further international efforts to expand sanctions against the Assad regime, to hold it to account for its human rights violations and to prepare an economic transition plan for the post-Assad era.

Canada has participated actively in every one of these meetings to date, and we will continue to demonstrate that we are truly friends of Syria, never more so than in this, their hour of greatest need. The proof of our friendship comes not merely in the form of our engagement with international partners, significant as it has been. It is also seen in the actions that we, ourselves, have taken since the outbreak of the crisis.

We continue to stand with the Syrian people in their great struggle. We know we must stand together, and I am particularly proud that I was able to be in the House earlier today when the resolution that was presented by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre was unanimously approved by all members of the House.

I think that is a great sign of the strength of this great Parliament of Canada that, despite the fact that we do have differences from time to time, there is no doubt, and I know over the next week or so we are going to have an opportunity to have those differences, the clear resolve tonight that we need to leave in this House is that 308 members of Parliament stand together with the people of Syria in their time of need. We are there for them. We stand with them. We see a brand new Syria coming down the pipe, with a new regime for peace, democracy and safety for all who live there.

It has been a pleasure to participate in this discussion tonight. I look forward to the questions from my hon. colleagues.

• (2300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Chair, I listened closely to the member for Mississauga—Streetsville's remarks.

He provided a detailed description of the six-point plan put forward by Kofi Annan, the special envoy not only of the Security Council, as he mentioned, but also the Arab League.

Currently, it is clear that not one of the points in the plan has been implemented. Kofi Annan is scheduled to speak to the Security Council Thursday. I would like the member to tell us if he has any

hope that Kofi Annan will come up with a new idea that will help put an end to the current impasse.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, all of us tonight, and I have been paying attention to a lot of the debate and the back and forth discussion, know this is complicated. Mr. Annan, the United Nations and many other international bodies have really tried their very best in a very difficult situation to advance a plan that makes the most sense for regime change and for a new Syria.

Clearly, and I believe I speak for all members of the House, we would like to see the Annan plan be accepted, do well and move forward. This is an individual who has clearly made his contribution on the international stage and is extremely well respected by all parties, including the regime that I think most of us would like to see changed in Syria.

Therefore, I would hope, as we move forward, Mr. Annan will continue to get more and more respect on the international stage to implement the plan that he has proposed. I am glad to see the Parliament of Canada standing united tonight in supporting what he is trying to accomplish.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I listened to my hon. colleague with great interest. However, what I have not heard tonight from his party, the government, is what steps Canada is anticipating to take, or whatever program it will take, should the al-Assad regime be removed from Syria. Will we be giving more aid to Syria? Will we match dollar for dollar if the Syrian community comes up and says that it is looking for that to happen?

Also, should there be an election after the regime leaves, will the government be sending international observers to ensure that things happen clearly?

We did engage in Libya. The Libyan elections will come up in a couple of days from now, but I still have not heard if the government will send election observers to Libya. Therefore, I would like to know from the member, or he can consult with his colleague the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, what the government plans are for Syria in the next couple of months.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, in this situation I do not think Canada has anything to apologize for or to say that we have not done in a 100% wholehearted way in supporting, most important, the citizens of Syria who, due to no fault of their own, are in difficult situations.

In fact, Canada has been a significant leader in aid to the Syrian people. I can go through the stats that my colleagues have raised before. Canada actually has been the number one leader in this. We have made more statements. We have been out in front more often than any other government in the world in standing up for the Syrian people.

It is absolutely clear, and I can go through the litany of statements if the member from Scarborough wants me to do it, that our ambassador to the United Nations has been extremely aggressive on this file. We have nothing to apologize for, but I will agree there is more to do.

Government Orders

When there is a regime change, Canada will be front and centre and will continue to provide international support and international development relief for the people of Syria so they can move on with their lives and build a better, democratic, safer country for themselves and their families.

• (2305)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville's remarks this evening. He has, on a number of occasions, pointed out the unanimous resolution of the House of Commons tonight and that is very important. I want to focus on one particular clause of that unanimous resolution and that is clause (i) which says that all parliamentarians, all Canadians, "stand in solidarity with those who aspire for peace, democratic governance and the protection of human rights" in Syria.

Could he expand a bit more on the protection of human rights, especially the rights of minority religious groups in Syria and what we expect to see from a future democratically elected government of Syria?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, Canada has taken it upon itself to be a leader in the fight against human rights violations in Syria. Just over a year ago, as I recall, Canada joined many other nations in imposing its first round of sanctions against the Assad regime in Syria and our government condemned the regime. We moved forward very quickly. The Canadian delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Council led the way in condemning the current Syrian regime and delivered its condemnation on behalf of 54 countries from various regions. Canada also co-sponsored a request to convene a special session of the council to conduct an independent investigation into those human rights violations.

Canada remains at the forefront of international efforts to bring an immediate end to Assad's violent campaign of terror. The Syrian people will have their day. Canada stands with them as they push for a better and brighter future, one where their fundamental freedoms are respected and their families can live in peace and security. That is all of our goal.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Chair, throughout the night we have heard government members say that Canada has played a significant role in the international arena. We have also heard other government members say that Canada's role has been diminished and we are not really big players anymore.

Why does the member think that Canada's international role or position has decreased, and why is it that government members are talking about Canada's international reputation so negatively?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, I know that there has been discussion tonight of being on the Security Council and not being on the Security Council. If we look at the history of Canada and various governments, not just ours but governments of other political stripes that have represented Canada, Canada has a reputation of making a huge difference in the world, not just because we serve on a certain body or because we have some medal hanging up in the hallway. Canada makes a difference because we continue to speak out effectively and work with our partners in many international organizations to get change done in the world. Canada was a leader in having the South African regime change, right? That is not a

partisan thing. I do not care what the political party of the day did it. We did it. We did not have a seat on the Security Council back then, but we stood up for what was right.

This government and this Parliament, and I am very proud of this Parliament tonight, is standing up for what is right in a united way. Canada can make a huge difference in the world in many different ways. We are doing it, we are going to keep doing it. Thankfully with the support of this House tonight, we will be stronger than ever in making a very strong statement about Syria, starting in a minute or two.

• (2310)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard has five minutes.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Chair, it is with some concern that I address the House this evening. I am concerned because this is an extremely complex international issue where human lives are at stake. That is why I commend the hon. member for Ottawa Centre. As part of our team, he was able to explain these challenges in a very humanistic way. I would also like to commend him on his initiative in asking for the emergency debate on Syria in the House.

I think that the tragic situation in this country and the UN's efforts to try to find peaceful solutions to this problem have already been clearly explained. Parliamentarians on both sides of the House, regardless of their party, described a tragic situation, exacerbated by the recent massacres of civilians. What is even more tragic is that children were massacred recently, which once again attracted global attention.

We cannot deny that this is a serious problem. Syria is in crisis. The violence and the murder of civilians must stop. An immediate cease fire must be implemented so that humanitarian aid can be given to Syrians in need in every region.

I believe that the member who spoke before me also pointed out the repercussions not just in Syria, but in all neighbouring countries, especially the arrival of refugees. For example, people are fleeing to Turkey, which has already accepted refugees. At least 150,000 people were displaced in 2011. Most people were displaced temporarily because they were fleeing their villages or cities before or during an attack, and then would return after the government forces left.

The largest displacements occurred between June and September, when almost 70,000 people left Maaret al-Noman, 45,000 fled Homs and 41,000 sought refuge further away.

I cannot help thinking that, in recent years, Canadians have never experienced the hardships suffered by the people of this country. That is why it is very difficult for me to imagine the extent of the human tragedy currently taking place in Syria. However, even though we may not understand what is happening, it does not prevent us from being duty bound to take action, or at the very least, to support UN actions.

Therefore, the NDP unreservedly supports the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States.

Government Orders

The NDP also condemns violence against civilians. We want to encourage support and co-operation, in order for humanitarian aid to reach Syrians.

• (2315)

[*English*]

The Deputy Chair: It being 11:15 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 14 reported)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:15 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, June 5, 2012

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Situation in Syria

Mr. Van Loan	8893	Mr. Saganash	8908
Motion	8893	Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	8909
Mr. Obhrai	8893	Mr. McKay	8910
Mr. Sorenson	8894	Mrs. Hughes	8910
Mr. Dewar	8894	Mr. Sweet	8911
Ms. Péclet	8895	Mr. Brahma	8912
Mr. Brahma	8895	Mr. McKay	8912
Mr. Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	8895	Mr. Alexander	8912
Mr. Dewar	8895	Mrs. Hughes	8913
Mr. Dechert	8897	Ms. Latendresse	8913
Ms. Péclet	8897	Mr. Dechert	8915
Mr. Brahma	8897	Mr. Karygiannis	8915
Mr. Cotler	8898	Mr. Saganash	8915
Mr. Obhrai	8900	Mr. Alexander	8916
Mr. Dewar	8900	Mrs. Ambler	8916
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	8901	Mr. Brahma	8917
Mr. Saganash	8902	Mr. McKay	8917
Ms. Latendresse	8902	Ms. Sitsabaiesan	8918
Mr. Butt	8903	Mr. Karygiannis	8918
Mrs. Hughes	8903	Mr. McKay	8918
Ms. Péclet	8903	Mr. Dechert	8919
Mr. Obhrai	8904	Mr. Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	8919
Mr. Brahma	8905	Mr. Karygiannis	8920
Mr. Dechert	8905	Mr. Dechert	8920
Mr. Dewar	8905	Mr. Butt	8921
Mr. Dechert	8906	Mr. Brahma	8922
Ms. Latendresse	8907	Mr. Karygiannis	8922
Mrs. Hughes	8907	Mr. Dechert	8923
Mr. Karygiannis	8907	Ms. Sitsabaiesan	8923
Mr. Butt	8908	Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	8923
		(Government Business No. 14 reported)	8924

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