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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 16, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 16, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

•(1005)

[English]

COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 66 of the Official Languages Act, to lay upon the table the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages covering the period from April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (exploitation and trafficking in persons).

She said: Mr. Speaker, trafficking in persons is an increasingly common global phenomenon, and unfortunately, Canada is not immune.

According to 2007 figures released by the UN, the annual proceeds of this criminal activity are estimated at \$32 billion. It is the third-largest criminal trade after drugs and weapons trafficking.

The main entry points into Canada include Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Canada is considered to be a country of

recruitment, destination and transit, and even a sex tourism destination. Our current laws must be reviewed in the age of this new, modern-day slavery.

I applaud the determination of one my colleagues, the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul, and her efforts to combat human trafficking. She has also introduced two bills on this matter in the House.

Thus, my bill is part of a broader effort to combat this particular crime, which destroys lives.

On the one hand, this bill sets out consecutive sentences for offences related to trafficking in persons and prostitution. Thus, it sets out tougher sentences.

On the other hand, it clarifies the provisions related to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. It creates a presumption regarding the exploitation of one person by another. Finally, it adds the offences of procuring and trafficking in persons to the list of offences to which the forfeiture of proceeds of crime apply.

I therefore encourage all of my colleagues to set aside partisanship and support this bill, which can save lives.

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

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition by citizens from all over the province of Ontario who are concerned with the proposed megaquarry in Melancthon township in Dufferin county, which will be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres. They are concerned with a number of things, one of which is that the proposed megaquarry would remove from production some of Ontario's best farmland.

The petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the proposed Highland Companies megaquarry development.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition in which the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to recognize the importance of the Experimental Lakes Area to the Government of Canada's mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems.

The petitioners are also calling on the government to reverse the decision to close the Experimental Lakes Area research station.

Lastly, they are calling on the government to continue to employ research staff and provide financial resources to the Experimental Lakes Area.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition to save the world-renowned and unique Experimental Lakes Area with 58 lakes and watersheds. Since its founding, the ELA has been a global leader in conducting whole ecosystem experiments, which have been critical to understanding harmful acid rain, algae blooms, methylmercury and shaping public policy. The ELA is needed to continue to find solutions to the problems that affect safe drinking water, lakes and fish populations.

The petitioners call on the government to reverse the decision to close the ELA research station and continue to staff and provide financial resources at the current or higher level of commitment.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present petitions signed by hundreds of people from Calgary, Alberta, as well as southwestern Ontario, calling on the House of Commons to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as human by amending section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

•(1010)

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have thousands upon thousands of signatures on a petition concerning the Experimental Lakes Area. The petitioners are predominantly from Manitoba but there are petitioners from across Canada. The thousands of signatures clearly indicate how many people are very concerned about the Experimental Lakes Area.

The petitioners are asking the government to reverse the decision to close the ELA research station and continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at current or higher levels of commitment. I am sure all the petitioners are waiting for an answer from the minister, as am I. I am proud to submit this petition.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of several residents of Prince Edward Island who are concerned about the proposed changes to the employment insurance program. In particular, they are concerned with the lack of consultation with respect to the fact that the changes will force people to drive two hours per day in rural areas in the

wintertime at risk to their personal safety and that the changes will force employers to hire workers who are not adequately trained, which will further punish areas that are already economically disadvantaged.

The petitioners call on the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development to cancel the proposed changes.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, have a petition with a number of signatures mostly from Ontario and some from Manitoba calling on the government to reverse its ill-imagined decision to shut down what was a world-renowned scientific research laboratory. Canada's Experimental Lakes Area is unique and, in fact, had received praise from the scientific community across the planet for its work on protecting freshwater sources. This is something that is near and dear to the hearts of not only these petitioners but Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Such short-sighted cuts to such programs as this hurt the long-term security not only of our environment and economy but the very fabric that holds this country together.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitioners to present today.

The first petition is also on the Experimental Lakes Area. The residents of Kenora and Dryden really want the ELA to be saved, to put the bottom line to it.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from petitioners across Canada in support of my cellphone freedom act, Bill C-560, which would take an important step in providing more customer choice and promoting competition in the wireless market so that Canadian consumers are no longer chained by anti-competitive cellphone locks.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Thunder Bay, Pass Lake and the Lake Superior north shore who support bringing back passenger rail. They are asking parliamentarians to support my Motion No. 291 to return passenger rail from Sudbury to Thunder Bay, Winnipeg and beyond.

[Translation]

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first concerns the Experimental Lakes research lab. The petitioners want the government to preserve the Experimental Lakes Area and to reverse its decision to cut it. According to a recent poll, water is the most important natural resource to all Canadians. We must protect this resource, and that is what this research lab does. It makes water its top priority so that we can have good-quality water. That is why I am presenting this petition.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is on hydraulic fracturing, subsoil fracturing.

The petitioners are calling for a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing until studies are conducted and their findings are published. The petition is from the Council of Canadians.

[English]

ORGAN HARVESTING

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today.

The first petition is from the London and Ingersoll communities, and it includes the Eritrean community. These people are very concerned about captors in the Sinai taking Eritrean people and ransoming them or harvesting their organs for transplant. These folks have made an effort to seek asylum in Israel but, unfortunately, they are not finding that asylum and are instead being detained in a prison in Israel.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to intervene to stop the practice of ransom and organ harvesting, and to convince the Israelis to provide a safe place for them in Israel.

• (1015)

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is in regard to the Experimental Lakes Area. As we all know, scientific knowledge is absolutely essential if we are going to preserve our fish, habitat and freshwater.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to reverse the decision regarding the closure of this project and to find the financial resources to enhance it.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege today to rise and present a petition on behalf of Canadians who are very concerned about water security and what steps, or lack of steps, the government is taking.

The petitioners are calling on the government to reverse the decision to close the ELA research station and to continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at the current or higher level of commitment.

We all recognize the value of water and the petitioners are very concerned.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also want to present a petition signed by a number of people from Alberta to save the Experimental Lakes Area research station and our ecosystem.

Routine Proceedings

As a number of my colleagues have mentioned, it is very important to provide the necessary funding and staff for this research station. It must continue its research, which can be used internationally.

[English]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am also rising to present a petition calling on the government to reverse the decision to close the Experimental Lakes Area research station given that the ELA provides essential scientific knowledge for the development of policies that ensures the future health of freshwater in this country and internationally. That is a question of public health.

RARE DISORDERS

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

The first petition notes that Canada is about the only industrialized country in the world that does not have a definition of rare disorder. For those people suffering from something that is either life-threatening or chronically debilitating that affects fewer than 2,000 people, it is harder to get the trials for drugs and it is harder to get treatment.

These petitioners from throughout my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands call on the government to take action to create a program for rare disorders and a pharmacare plan to go with it.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is also from residents throughout British Columbia.

The petitioners are calling on the government to stop the promotion of the so-called northern gateway project, to treat it dispassionately, to ensure full hearings and to ensure there is impartiality from the current government when looking at this proposal.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, join in the theme of the petitions on saving the ELA, Canada's freshwater research station.

I present this petition from a number of Canadians who are very concerned about this issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on the need to continue the Experimental Lakes Area program. The petition, signed by Albertans, is a testament to the spiritual and cultural connection that Canadians have to our country's drinking water supply.

[English]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, join my colleagues in presenting a petition this morning signed by many people across this country.

Business of Supply

The petitioners would like to draw the attention of this House to the Experimental Lakes Area research station which is a unique facility that provides research and education in regard to freshwater.

The petitioners call upon the government to recognize the importance of the ELA to the Government of Canada's mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems, and also to reverse the decision to close the ELA research station.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to present a petition on behalf of many Canadians who oppose closing the Experimental Lakes Area research station. I am passionate about this because, as my colleagues probably know, I am presently fighting cuts to science at the Maurice Lamontagne Institute. I am pleased to support Canadians by presenting this petition, which opposes the closing of this research station.

• (1020)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am also presenting a petition signed by many Albertans who want the government to reverse its decision to close the Experimental Lakes Area research station in the Great Lakes area. Closing this research station will mean that the data collected and published by many government experts will be lost. The expertise will also be lost. I support all these petitioners.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to also present a petition signed by dozens of Canadians who disagree with the government's decision to close the Experimental Lakes Area research station. The petition basically recognizes the excellent freshwater research carried out at this station, which has gained international recognition for its quality work. We are therefore asking the government to reverse its decision to close the Experimental Lakes Area and to maintain funding in order to continue the research and support the excellent work being done there.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—OMNIBUS LEGISLATION

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.) moved:

That the House agree with the comments of the Right Honourable Member for Calgary Southwest on March 25, 1994, when he criticized omnibus legislation, suggesting that the subject matter of such bills is so diverse that a single vote on the

content would put Members in conflict with their own principles and dividing the bill into several components would allow Members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill; and that the House instruct the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to study what reasonable limits should be placed on the consideration of omnibus legislation and that the Committee report back its findings, including specific recommendations for legislative measures or changes to the Standing Orders, no later than December 10, 2012.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to once again voice my concern, the concern of the Liberal Party and indeed the concern of a rising number of Canadians about the damage to democracy being done through the use of omnibus bills.

Concerns about the problems posed by omnibus bills have been growing for some time now. However, the lengths to which the current Prime Minister and his government have used—and I would say abused—budget implementation bills as kitchen sink omnibus bills have reached staggering and dangerous levels.

[Translation]

It is rather shocking to see that the Conservative government is continuing to produce bills like this. The government said it was open to suggestions from the opposition on issues affecting Canadians, but how many speeches have we heard this year about this impractical way of examining bills?

I have not compiled statistics on this issue, but we often hear the word “omnibus” in this House, in either statements or speeches during debate or question period, not to mention the many points of order.

In recent years, budget implementation bills have become increasingly long and complex. Although the length of a bill does not automatically imply that it contains a series of unrelated measures, we have seen that the bills introduced lately have covered an increasing number of topics.

Maclean's analyzed budget implementation bills between 1994 and 2005 and discovered that they averaged 75 pages. Since 2006, these bills have averaged well over 300 pages.

We all remember last June with Bill C-38, when we voted for nearly 24 hours on a long list of amendments proposed by the opposition parties in order to show that omnibus bills are essentially anti-democratic.

• (1025)

[English]

Given that the government has made it no secret that it intends to bring forward another omnibus bill this fall, I believe it is time for this House to recognize the detrimental effect these bills have on democracy in Canada and commit itself to find reasonable limits that could be put in place to end this practice.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

When a government party abuses its power by proposing completely unrelated measures in a single omnibus bill, it deprives parliamentarians of their right to truly debate these various measures and to express their opinions on each of them by way of a vote. This way of doing things also gives Canadians less opportunity to share their opinions about the bill—whether favourable or unfavourable—and thus weakens our democracy.

Omnibus bills can play a significant role in the Westminster parliamentary system, but only when they are used to amend many laws that have a single purpose or, at the very least, a limited number of objectives. The Conservative government has abused its power by introducing several omnibus bills covering dozens of unrelated topics.

Other administrations have resolved this problem by reducing the number of subjects that can be covered by a bill to just one. For example, in 42 of the 50 American states, the constitution prohibits the excessive use of omnibus bills and, although this type of bill continues to be popular in Washington, D.C., Congress is currently examining a bill to put an end to this practice.

[English]

To understand the extent of the problem, we need only look back a few months at this spring's omnibus bill, Bill C-38.

Bill C-38 was one of the worst abuses of Parliament we have witnessed in this House. It was 425 pages long, it contained more than 60 unrelated matters, and it amended or abolished 74 pieces of legislation.

Of Bill C-38's 503 clauses, clause 52—a single clause out of 503—contained an entirely new act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act 2012, a whole new environmental assessment act contained within a single clause of a so-called budget bill.

On March 25, 1994, a young member of Parliament, who then represented the riding of Calgary West, rose in the House to complain that a budget bill, called Bill C-17 at the time, which was only 21 pages in length, was indeed an omnibus bill and that these types of bills were bad for democracy.

He stated:

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.

He expanded eloquently saying:

...in the interest of democracy I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

We can agree with some of the measures but oppose others. How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse? Dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill.

I heartily agree with these words spoken by the young MP from Calgary West. It makes me wonder how that young eloquent MP could ever have changed his views since becoming the Prime Minister of this country. It defies all logic.

I will give the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt that he believed he was speaking the truth back in 1994. Indeed, his criticism back then resonates even more today.

He stated:

...the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.

Let us put that into context with Bill C-38. With Bill C-38, if MPs wanted to vote for improvements to the disability savings plan, they had to simultaneously vote to kill the Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. With Bill C-38, if MPs wanted to vote against raising the qualifying age for old age security, they had to simultaneously vote against making the Governor General's salary taxable.

The government tells us that it will bring forward another omnibus budget bill this fall. Liberals have said repeatedly that we would like to tackle MP pension reform. What kind of choice would there be for MPs if those pension changes are included in an omnibus bill that also makes Canada's coasts more vulnerable to oil spills? We must ask ourselves why the government would choose to do that. Why would it cram so many different unrelated measures into a single bill?

● (1030)

[Translation]

I think that the Conservatives like this approach because it allows them to then accuse members of other parties of having voted against their initiatives.

[English]

The government claims that the reason is to ensure that it can get its measures passed in a timely manner. Unless several members of the Conservative bench have recently fled their caucus, the Conservative government still has the power to pass multiple separate pieces of legislation. That is what happens with a majority government.

As for timely passage, this is hardly a government that shies away from time allocation and closure. Indeed, it has set the record, so that argument simply does not hold water. That leaves us with two other possibilities. The Conservatives either do not believe Canadians will accept some of their mean-spirited unpopular policies unless they hide them amidst other popular measures, or they intend to attack MPs who oppose negative measures in the bill, accusing them of also opposing positive measures.

No matter which of these two is true, quite possibly both of them, the math adds up to an attempt to obscure the facts from Canadians, an attempt to hide the truth and impugn false motives on their opponents. As such, these represent an attack on transparency and on democracy itself.

The Prime Minister said it very well when he stated:

How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

We can agree with some of the measures but oppose others. How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse? Dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill.

Business of Supply

Why will the Prime Minister not listen to his own words?

It is not just the Liberal Party or the younger version of the Prime Minister who oppose omnibus bills. The Speaker's predecessors have expressed similar concerns about the use of such bills and where this could ultimately lead us.

On January 26, 1971, Speaker Lamoureux cautioned the House on the use of such bills and warned:

However, where do we stop? Where is the point of no return? ...The honourable member for Winnipeg North Centre, and I believe the honourable member for Edmonton West, said that we might reach the point where we would have only one bill, a bill at the start of the session for the improvement of the quality of life in Canada which would include every single proposed piece of legislation for the session. That would be an omnibus bill with a capital 'O' and a capital 'B.' But would it be acceptable legislation? There must be a point where we go beyond what is acceptable from a strictly parliamentary standpoint.

Given what we have seen in the House with the last few budget implementation bills, Speaker Lamoureux's concerns should be heeded. We are well on our way to becoming the "one bill a session" Parliament that he feared.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

This Conservative government always manages to take advantage of procedural grey areas. The definition of an omnibus bill given on page 724 of the second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* reads as follows:

Although this expression is commonly used, there is no precise definition of an omnibus bill. In general, an omnibus bill seeks to amend, repeal or enact several Acts, and is characterized by the fact that it is made up of a number of related but separate initiatives. An omnibus bill has "one basic principle or purpose which ties together all the proposed enactments and thereby renders the Bill intelligible for parliamentary purposes". One of the reasons cited for introducing an omnibus bill is to bring together in a single bill all the legislative amendments arising from a single policy decision in order to facilitate parliamentary debate.

This is a simple and concise definition, which certainly does not apply to the budget megabill that was introduced in May.

[*English*]

Clearly, there is no longer any requirement for bills to focus on single topics, at least in the view of the Conservative government. The government simply lumps them all together and says it is all about economic well-being. The cabinet seems to view parliamentary oversight with great contempt, as an annoying rubber stamp that hinders it rather than the democratically elected body that holds Canada's government to account.

We should not have to remind the government that Canadians elect members of Parliament, not an emperor. Our entire system of democracy is based on our government being required to seek the consent of the democratically elected House. Omnibus bills hinder MPs from performing this elected duty.

Furthermore, Canadians who elect their members of Parliament have a right to know how they vote on different government measures. Omnibus bills deny Canadians that right. Clearly, rules must be put in place to reverse this practice before our democracy is further undermined.

We fully understand that the government has the right to manage the business of the House. It is the government. However, that

management cannot be done at the expense of the basic democratic principles of transparency and accountability.

We also recognize that a rule that would arbitrarily prevent a bill from amending more than one act might be unworkable, given the reality of consequential amendments to other acts. However, a balance must be struck.

It is for that reason that this motion would direct the appropriate committee, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, to launch an immediate study to determine what reasonable limits should be placed on omnibus legislation.

While a 21-page budget bill would probably not cross the line, a 425-page bill that amends or abolishes 74 acts clearly would. We should ensure that Parliament does its work here to define that line and to put rules in place to prevent future legislation from trampling upon it.

When Parliament resumed this fall, I raised the specific issue of MP pension legislation. I made the point that the Liberal Party was ready and willing to vote in favour of whatever changes the government decided to bring forward. Given that Canadians had to tighten their belts in these fragile economic times, it is only right that we, as parliamentarians, should also set a good example by modifying our pension arrangements.

In addition to very clearly signifying this willingness to modify our pension package, I urged the government to fast-track a separate bill on this matter so that all Canadians could see how their individual MPs voted. That would have been the preferred democratic approach.

Instead, the government chose to ignore the Liberal proposal and announced that MP pension reform would be buried within the upcoming omnibus bill. Sadly, the government missed an opportunity to show how it cares about democracy.

Two weeks later, a motion that I had put on the order paper, a motion quite similar to the one that we are debating today, a motion for the procedure and House affairs committee to study ways of establishing reasonable limits on omnibus bills, was raised in that precise committee, although in camera. Again, sadly, I must report to the House that the motion has now disappeared from the order paper.

The Liberal Party does not intend to let go of this matter. Democracy is too important to be swept under the carpet. I look forward to those who will follow me today, and I genuinely hope that all of us in the House will demonstrate to Canadians that Parliament sets the example when it comes to putting democracy to the test.

Business of Supply

In conclusion, let me read today's Liberal opposition motion one last time to refresh all of us and summarize what we will vote on this evening:

That the House agree with the comments of the Right Honourable Member for Calgary Southwest on March 25, 1994, when he criticized omnibus legislation, suggesting that the subject matter of such bills is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put Members in conflict with their own principles.

I hope that the Prime Minister will remember those words today and remind all of his colleagues on the government side of the House.

● (1040)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I looked at this motion today with great interest because, as we well know, we had great difficulties with not just the form but the substance of the Conservatives' use of omnibus legislation in the spring. As my colleague pointed out, a whole number of measures and laws were crammed into one bill purporting to be somewhat supportive of the budget that had been introduced earlier but clearly far beyond the mandate of the budget.

We have had a number of interesting rulings from Speakers and directions from Parliament as to what the use of this tactic should be and should not be. The primary role of any legislature that is built on the parliamentary tradition that we have is to hold government to account. That is not just the role of the opposition, that we faithfully commit to every day, but it is also the role of members of Parliament who presently occupy the government benches. That is their role as well because that is the central construct and belief of Parliament, to hold the government of the day to account. Otherwise, we have a system ruled by fiat and controlled by very few as opposed to the democratic will of the country.

My hon. friend's motion is somewhat specific to the nature of the problem and the question facing us, with the Conservative government abusing its power in the use of omnibus bills, but it is also somewhat vague in terms of what prescriptions my friend in the Liberal Party might be seeking. He says there is a line and when the Liberals used omnibus bills to a certain size, some 20 or 30 pages, it had not crossed the line. However, when the Conservatives went to 400 pages with many clauses to change Canadian laws that was not okay.

Where is the line? Is it the number of clauses? Is it the extent? We have seen Liberal omnibus bills in the past of 126 pages in length and some 120 clauses. I do not know if that was over the line or not.

If my friend is describing what the rules might be to constrain government and the powers that it may have in a majority, could he offer Canadians an idea of where that line to prevent the abuse of power may actually be?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the official opposition also basically agrees with the motion that we are presenting today. How we establish that line is really the work of the committee. We are proposing that the procedures and House affairs committee sit down, study the matter and look at examples of other legislatures where this kind of approach has been taken. I personally look forward to debating this with the hon. member and with the other members from the Conservative government.

This is something that the procedures and House affairs committee can do best, to establish that line in a way that would be acceptable to Parliament and to Canadians.

● (1045)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's remarks and agree with him. However, there is an issue that my colleague did not raise. That is that not only is the omnibus bill an affront to the House and how we vote on specific matters, it also seriously undermines the functions of committees.

Bill C-38 was a prime example where environment and fisheries were in the bill, but it went to the finance committee. Committees of the House over time develop some expertise in the subject areas. Committee members when appointed to those committees do research, do background and study the subject for a number of years. Therefore, at the end of the day, members from all parties become much more knowledgeable about those areas and the decisions that are being made.

Does my colleague agree with that? How does he see doing away with the omnibus bill approach strengthening the ability of committees to do their jobs, so that MPs can better represent the various industries and commodities on a committee basis?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Malpeque for bringing up that very important point, which I did not underline in my presentation. He is quite right. If we look at Bill C-38 there were issues dealing with the environment, immigration and a host of other subjects where committees have not only the authority but the expertise to really treat these matters as a bill makes its way through the House.

He is quite right to point out that the authority of committees and the work that is done in committees is extremely important. When we take an omnibus approach and the only committee that ends up looking at it is the finance committee, we are shortchanging Canadians with respect to the democratic process.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this motion is a good one and I certainly intend to support it.

Last spring, with the amendments to Bill C-38, we had almost 24 hours of nonstop voting. All of the Conservatives voted repeatedly and recklessly against amendments that few of them had ever read. However, is this not the tip of an even bigger iceberg?

How can this House and the Liberals help to revamp our electoral and parliamentary rules so that MPs work for their constituents and Canada rather than being whipped into mindless lockstep by their parties?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has indeed touched on something that is even bigger than the discussion we are having today on omnibus legislature, the need for democratic reform. We need to go back to something we espoused many years ago, that MPs represent their constituents. All 308 of us here are duly elected and have a duty to speak on behalf of our constituents, as opposed to simply voting on matters as directed.

Business of Supply

In that respect, I think all parties bear some responsibility. All of us need to be thinking and working towards the bigger issue of the democracy that is supposed to exist in this Parliament, an issue that goes well beyond the specific question of omnibus bills.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would agree with my colleague for Westmount—Ville-Marie on the bill being anti-democratic. It does not allow for debate in this House.

It is rare for me to agree with the Prime Minister, but when he was a young man back in 1994 he brought forward similar concerns to those the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, that the House be given the ability to debate different sections of an omnibus bill. However, when the young Prime Minister made his speech, the Liberals still rammed through their omnibus bill.

Is this motion an acknowledgement of the mistake that the Liberals made in 1994 of ramming through that omnibus bill?

• (1050)

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I will say that we tested the system for sure back in the time of the Liberal government. Yes, we tested the system and went beyond it. However, I hope that we are not going to take the attitude today of, “Well you did it so we’re going to do it”. That is not what we are here to do.

There is a question of degree. In the 1994 case, we were talking about a 21-page bill with five specific subjects in it. However, Bill C-38 was 425 pages long and affected 74 regulations or acts of Parliament.

Yes, we also stepped over the line and we are here to try to correct that, hopefully with everyone’s co-operation.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we get to learn what the Liberal priority is. This is the last day this year on which the Liberals can choose the subject of debate. Is their priority job creation? No. Is their priority economic growth? Apparently not. Is their priority tackling crime? No. Is their priority harnessing our resources to benefit future generations? No, apparently not. The Liberal priority, our subject for today, is procedure, more specifically an effort to make it harder for members of Parliament actually to get things done up here.

In March, our economic action plan was outlined in the House of Commons and it was voted on and approved in April. For decades, it has been the practice to have budget bills to implement budgets. That will continue this autumn. The economic action plan is a comprehensive plan that responds to Canada’s fiscal and economic challenges. Our plan has helped create over 820,000 net new jobs since July 2009, of which 90% are full-time and nearly 80% in the private sector. However, as the global economic recovery remains fragile, especially with challenges in Europe and the United States, it is vital that Canada continues to show decisive leadership on the economy.

We will not allow the opposition to threaten our economic recovery with political games and obstruction of bills aimed at creating jobs and growing our economy. The real objective of the members of the opposition is to block our low-tax plan for jobs and growth because they simply disagree with it. The New Democrats, for example, would prefer implementing a job-killing carbon tax that

would increase the price of everything, including gas, groceries and electricity. Bigger government would kill job growth. The NDP leader has tried to conscript his friends in the media to say that he has no plan to implement a carbon tax. After all, the NDP opposed the Liberal carbon tax in 2008. We now know why: the 2008 Liberal green shift carbon tax would only have generated \$15 billion a year. That is far short of the more than \$21 billion in government revenue the NDP has booked for its carbon tax in its platform. Apparently, the New Democrats opposed the Liberal green shift carbon tax because it was too small. The Liberal carbon tax would not have produced nearly as much tax revenue as the NDP proposal would. We will not go down the path of a job-killing carbon tax.

I take this opportunity to outline our priority, the economy and our government’s strong economic record.

[Translation]

We have accomplished a great deal. Canada continues to be one of the top performers among the world’s major economies. Despite the fragile state of the global economy, over 820,000 net new jobs have been created, as I just mentioned.

• (1055)

[English]

Our economic plan is working to help hard-working Canadians and to ensure that the government delivers more value for each tax dollar.

[Translation]

Canadians have made it quite clear that they expect their government to keep taxes low. We agree.

We are helping the average Canadian family to save \$3,300 in taxes thanks to about 140 tax relief measures that we have introduced since 2006.

We will not give in to the NDP and the Liberals, who are calling for tax increases—like the \$21.5 billion carbon tax proposed by the NDP.

[English]

The number one priority of our Conservative government remains the economy. With the global economic recovery still fragile, we are committed to creating jobs and economic growth by supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs through innovative measures like the small business hiring credit.

[Translation]

Canada’s economic action plan 2012 will ensure long-term prosperity for future generations. Canada is the best country in the world, and we are fortunate to have an abundance of natural resources that the world needs.

Business of Supply

Emerging economies such as China and India need our energy, minerals, metals, wood, wheat and grain, and many more things besides. If we can keep our economy moving swiftly forward to meet those needs, we will ensure our future prosperity, even in this time of global economic uncertainty.

[*English*]

That is why our plan works, with responsible resource development and a focus on developing new markets abroad.

This means jobs and prosperity across Canada, and with it the ability to provide first-rate services like health and education. Families will continue to be able to take advantage of the children's arts tax credit and children's sports and fitness tax credit. These credits make it easier for families to get their children involved in important parts of growing up.

Nonetheless, it is not just the youngest members of society who will get the benefit of our tax reductions. The tax burden can be particularly difficult for many seniors, especially those on a fixed income. That is why we have taken measures to remove over 380,000 seniors from the tax rolls entirely.

Employment insurance is an important safety net to help families carry on through difficult times after a job is lost. We believe that hard-working Canadians want to get back to work. Accordingly, we are taking action to deliver results on connecting Canadians with jobs.

[*Translation*]

We all have unique employment experience. With the changes to EI, this experience will be taken into account to support economic growth and meet the challenges presented by our aging population, not to mention the increasing global competition from specialized labour. We need to do a better job of connecting Canadian workers with available jobs.

[*English*]

The government believes it is important to provide Canadians who want to work with help getting back to work. That is why we are going to send relevant job postings twice a day to Canadians receiving employment insurance benefits. These job postings will come from a broad range of sources, including private sector job listings.

We will also provide Canadians with more and better information to make informed decisions about how best to conduct or expand their job search. The overall objective is to make it more attractive to work than to collect benefits.

We are also making savings to balance the budget in the medium term. The taxes spent to pay the interest on the debt are dollars that could be spent on better things or to lower taxes.

Families have had to tighten their belts through this tough economic period. Our government is doing the same. We have worked to identify waste, overlap and inefficiencies in government services. These act as roadblocks to ensuring real results for hard-earned tax dollars.

The House of Commons, we here in this place, will be reducing our own budget by 6.9%. On top of that, members' of Parliament and

senators' salaries were frozen in 2010 and our government has decreased ministerial office budgets by 18% since 2010. Notably, we have had significantly lower expenditures than previous governments and, unlike the Liberals, we have not treated government jets as personal taxis.

We are now concerned about getting expenditures down. I am afraid that the New Democrats would be more interested in getting revenues up and that they would do it through a carbon tax, which would raise the price of everything for hard-working families—

• (1100)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I do apologize for raising a point of order in the midst the government House leader's presentation, but I have been very patient in waiting to hear anything of relevance to the key motion before us on the importance of limiting omnibus legislation. A recitation of the government's virtues is not on the floor for debate at the moment. We are talking about the importance of limiting the misuse and abuse of omnibus bills.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, responding to the point of order and not as part of my speech, I would point out that this motion arises from, as we heard from the Liberal House leader's initial speech, concerns about the government's budget implementation bill. I am reviewing the contents of that bill, the objectives, what it was seeking to do and why it is part of a coherent goal. Therefore, my presentation is quite responsive to the issue before us today.

The Deputy Speaker: I am actually inclined to agree with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. The hon. House leader for the government has spent, I think now, 30 seconds responding to the motion that is before the House and over 10 minutes addressing issues in the budget, which I have to say, in my interpretation of the situation, is very far from the motion before the House today for debate.

All of us understand the very wide latitude in the parameters of debate allowed in this House. The comments by the House leader to this point have not been totally irrelevant, but they are a very far stretch and so I would ask him to complete this part of his speech and address the issue before the House.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect, I and I think every member of the House will find great challenges addressing the motion before us without addressing the economic policy of the government. The very motion we are debating here today addresses budget implementation acts, which implement the budget, which implement the government's economic action plan. If you, Mr. Speaker, are suggesting that we cannot discuss the very content of the bills that are being disputed on a motion that says that those contents should not be in those bills, you are asking us to debate in the House something which you then say we cannot debate.

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I do not know how we can talk around the bills and what is in them without talking about the bills and what is in them and without talking about the economic action plan. If that is your ruling, Mr. Speaker, you should have ruled most of what was spoken by the opposition House leader out of order and every reference to any economic plan, anything to do with the budget or anything to do with the content of the budget will not be allowed today. We are talking about budget implementation bills, with the greatest of respect—

The Deputy Speaker: The House leader for the official opposition is addressing the point of order?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague across the way goes very close to attempting to challenge the decision that you just made. In your ruling, you talked about the proportionality of his speech and 30 seconds on the actual notion of omnibus bills, not with respect to just what happened in the previous budget, and then 95% of his discourse and everything in one particular budget bill misses the mark entirely of what we are attempting to address today.

What we are addressing today and what I will seek to do in my remarks is the use and misuse of omnibus legislation. There is lots to talk about in that without going into particulars and without attacking other parties for particular economic policies, both invented and real, and have lots of discourse in this place about the use of omnibus bills which members of his caucus had lots of opinions of when they were in opposition and maybe have fewer now that they are in government.

Without challenging the Chair, we are at the point where the House leader for the government can certainly talk a lot about his defence of the use and misuse of omnibus legislation without having to reiterate every talking point about the previous budget.

• (1105)

The Deputy Speaker: I will expand on my ruling to this degree. I am not ruling the House leader out of the order. I am simply inviting him, as all other members, to address the issue that is before the House. He is quite within the realm of relevancy with regard to the particular omnibus bill that was before us this past spring and can address comments to that.

I have to say to him and to other members of the House who are thinking along the same lines that you should not spend your whole time allotted to you in your speech to one particular bill. There is a broader issue before the House and that should be addressed as well in your speech.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I shall continue as best I can knowing that the mover of the motion only spoke to two specific bills, one in 1994 and the one earlier this spring that implemented our budget. Within that context, I will attempt to speak to those two bills as you, Mr. Speaker, have limited our debate as such. That will create challenges, I think, for every member of the House and I look forward to seeing how they cope with that, but I will move forward on that basis.

The motion that the Liberal House leader made refers to statements that were made by the then member for Calgary West almost 20 years ago. We should put those comments in context. I also want to provide some other quotes from that debate in which the

members of the Liberal Party, now the third party, would, I am sure, be interested.

The original comments were made as part of a point of order to the Speaker. The Speaker did not find in the Liberals' favour at that time. Mr. Speaker Parent ruled:

In conclusion, it is procedurally correct and common practice for a bill to amend, repeal or enact several statutes.

Therefore, the ruling was settled at that time, some 20 years ago almost, and here we are revisiting it today.

Prior to that ruling, members weighed in. I will remind the House about some of the comments from that debate. Take, for example, the following:

While the subject matter may be diverse, I suggest to the hon. member that given the fact they were all introduced in the budget, they form a whole, unified policy thrust which the government has put forward....

That comment, which talked about it as a coherent economic plan and gave the basis for putting all those measures in one bill, came, no less, from the Liberals' leading parliamentary expert, Peter Milliken, in support of the use of budget implementation bills. He went on to outline some of the items in the Budget Implementation Act, very similar to my comments earlier. He was talking about items like programs to stimulate job creation and economic growth, measures to help balance the budget and improvements to the employment insurance system, all items that were included in that bill. It sounds an awful lot like it addresses the same subjects that economic action plan 2012 does.

What the 2012 budget plan does is cover the exact same subject matter. Of course, Mr. Milliken's comments were on the Liberal 1994 budget, but it is striking how the subject matter of the items covered is exactly the same.

Despite the Liberals' track record, they brought forward this motion today. It runs contrary to their own record and it is not anything more than a cynical attempt to accomplish their actual agenda to try to block our government from implementing our economic action plan.

While our government is focused on creating jobs, economic growth and securing long-term prosperity, the opposition is, sadly, once again focused on political games and obstruction. We will not be sidetracked by those games and obstruction. We will continue to stay the course and implement our plan to continue to build on the 820,000 net new jobs created since July 2009 and get Canada through these difficult times of economic uncertainty.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the government House leader's speech and the one thing he did not address was the main point of this motion, which is about respect. Clearly, the Conservatives have not shown respect for members of Parliament in the House when they have moved closure and time allocation. They do not want us to actually debate bills. At the root of this motion is also respect for Canadians.

Business of Supply

There are many entry points for civil society to engage in the legislative process and this is something we should welcome. Whether they are ideas from our constituents for a legislative change, people can participate in many different ways. They can write letters to the editor. They can testify at committee. MPs can read into the record letters from their constituents about what people are thinking about legislation. There are all these entry points for civil society.

When the New Democrats read letters into the record, the Conservatives mocked us. When civil society came to committee and gave good feedback about how to make this legislation better, not one amendment was accepted. Effectively, the Conservatives are shutting out civil society, which is showing disrespect to Canadians and democracy.

What does the House leader think this process does to encourage Canadians to participate in our parliamentary democracy?

• (1110)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have this opportunity to set the record straight because I believe my hon. friend from Halifax has created a very false impression.

When we look at the budget implementation debate from this past spring, one of the two bills that I am being allowed to address, I would point out that it had the most extensive debate at second reading of any budget implementation bill in Canadian history. That is a fairly strong example of respect for this institution in allowing it to be debated.

At second reading of the budget implementation bill, we had seven days of debate; at committee we had thirteen days of debate; at subcommittee, we had five days of debate; at report stage, we had a further three days of debate; and at third reading, we had another day of debate. That is a total of 30 days of debate.

Were enough people given the chance to speak? At committee and subcommittee, 145 groups and individuals had an opportunity to make representations in person, setting aside the number of written submissions. In this House, we had 214 speeches delivered. That is a tremendous amount of participation and process.

Therefore, to say that there is any lack of respect for these institutions, I would say that that amount of debate shows an unprecedented level of respect for the institutions and the process that has not ever been seen with any previous budget implementation bill. That is something for which the government should be given credit, not criticized.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, holy smokes, the minister saying that we are trying to create a false impression is very rich on his part.

The minister referred to a ruling by a past Speaker with regard other legislation that has come before the House. Speaker Parent said that it was well in line that a budget bill could amend several statutes. The minister tried to sort of lump this in with the abuses we have seen from the government. What about the 400-page document with 753 clauses changing or repealing 70 acts of Parliament and 60 distinct measures? How is that for several statutes? The minister should not lump the two examples together.

He also talked about consultation, the number of interventions and the 145 groups. There were 800 amendments proposed to the bill.

The government likes to say that it had this, this and this and that we voted against it. The fact is that it is a bouquet of thorns that may have a rose in it.

However, the government voted against the 800 amendments. It was 47% of the representatives in the House that put forward 800 amendments. Was there nothing there that the government saw that could have added to the overall bill or maybe to the debate? Was not one of them worthy of support?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, one of the things I did not include in the statistics I gave was the extensive amount of prebudget consultation that took place before committee when Canadians were asked for their views, and I participated in some of those. I was amazed to see the extent to which the submissions of Canadians were included and reflected in budget measures, far more than the impression given by the opposition. Canadians wanted to see steps taken in their budget to reduce waste in government. They wanted to see steps taken to ensure we balanced our budget. They wanted to see steps taken to make employment insurance more responsive to our economic needs. In those prebudget consultations, we had submissions about the importance of harnessing the resource potential and allowing us to move to create jobs in the resource sector faster and more quickly to respond to our challenges.

Those were the kinds of things that people talked about in those prebudget submissions and those made it into the budget. Those then were reflected in the budget implementation proposal. They were part of the comprehensive economic action plan, part of a comprehensive whole, that the budget reflected, which we are trying to implement.

Some people look for any way they can to stop measures with which they do not agree. I understand the opposition parties do not agree with lower taxes. They want higher taxes. I understand they do not necessarily share our priority with getting the budget balanced. We think Canadians share that as a priority. I know the opposition parties do not but these are important. They are important if we look at the global challenges elsewhere, the risks of having high debt and the economic instability in Europe that has been caused by that.

We do not want to go down that path. We want to go down the path that has given Canada the strongest economic growth of any major economy coming out of the downturn, the strongest job growth of any major economy coming out of the downturn, the soundest banking system in the world year after year, a strong track record that has given us the most skilled workforce in the world, which has helped us to respond to economic challenges.

We need to keep building on those things. We cannot rest on our laurels. We cannot go backward. We have to go forward into the economic future and think about that future. This is why our budget and our budget bill are focused on the long-term economic prosperity of Canada.

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• (1115)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the course of an omnibus bill many changes are made to legislation. In my experience in the House of Commons changes to legislation require careful attention. They require the attention of a committee, through witnesses, to the way that legislation will work.

What we saw with the omnibus bill was legislation that changed 70 bills with no amendments. That is a bad situation for Canadian legislative procedure and will likely lead to problems in the future. Even people who supported some of the proposed environmental changes said that amendments were needed, but they did not happen.

Part of what is wrong with omnibus bills is that we do not get proper legislation, even if it is in the way that the government wants it. For the government to think it can put forward legislation that will change 70 bills without proper consultation and proper work done at committee is really bizarre to say the least.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, my friend is disregarding the important process of consultation that I did not even talk about in my original outline of the days of consultation. Almost a year of prebudget consultation took place. In fact, many of his constituents called for changes to resource development so they could create jobs in the north, changes that he and his party opposed.

Therefore, when the member talks about who respects the input we get, I would put it to him that the government is far more respectful of the priorities of northerners, as reflected in that bill, for job creation and economic growth, for the opportunity to share in the resources and the potential of their territory in the way that provinces in the south of Canada have been able to.

It is remarkable that my colleague would have difficulties with that, but it made sense to do that in one economic action plan, in a budget that set out our plan for economic growth for the future and a budget implementation bill that implemented the budget.

I knew my colleague has other priorities, things like a carbon tax. A carbon tax would not be in the interest of northern Canadians because they would be the ones who would be punished most of all by a carbon tax that would increase energy costs and harm the important potential resource development opportunities they would have.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House, where the role of each member is to understand the government's proposals and to advance other ideas to improve the situation in Canada.

Contrary to what my government colleague was talking about, today's debate is precisely about the tactics used by the government, namely omnibus bills. Now that it has a majority, the government is abusing its power to use this procedure.

Unlike my colleague, my friend the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, I can talk about a subject for 10 minutes or more without always getting off the point, as the government does every day.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Toronto—Danforth, who has a great deal of experience and expertise in this area.

[*English*]

There are many who suggest that the debate today is in particular to what we have seen over the current year. In respect to the Speaker's earlier comments, I will touch briefly on the most recent example of the abuse of power of what is omnibus legislation, because it sets a certain context for today's discussion.

However, it is in the larger context of the gradual reduction and authority of the role of Parliament that brings us to support this motion and brings us cause for concern for where the current Conservative government is heading. In the context of the majority that it has, with the 100% of power that is given to it by our parliamentary system and by a voting system that we think should be changed to be more proportional, more representative of the intentions of voters, that was achieved through a vote of 39% in the last federal election, with a 60% turnout of all eligible voters, which actually equates somewhere down to a little less than 25% of all eligible voters having supported what mandate the government sought throughout the election.

Let us expand that to the notion that the Conservatives did not run on a number of the changes we saw in last spring's omnibus budget bill. There was no mention in the last election campaign to gut the protections in the Fisheries Act. To protect the notion that habitat is somehow connected to the resources of fish, that fish need a place to spawn, is somehow a foreign concept to the government. It included that in the bill.

There was no mention in the last election, in which the Conservatives received less than 25% of eligible voter support, of the notion of destroying the environmental assessment process, particularly in relation to large projects. According to what little evidence we did have from the Auditor General of Canada, who I hope the government still has some modicum of respect for, these were the facts. Under the changes proposed by the government, we would move from 4,000 to 5,000 environmental assessments a year down to somewhere around 12 to 15, not thousand, environmental assessments. We are not talking about small projects. We are talking about major mines, pipelines and significant projects that have some sort of environmental assessment, some place for the public to interact with the government, the proponents of the project and to raise concerns.

Later today, I will be intervening in one of those such processes around the Enbridge northern gateway pipeline, a process that the government also undermined midway through the use of these omnibus bills, which some will suggest is somehow only an issue for progressive-minded voters.

However, I will quote my friend, the knee-jerk lefty radical Andrew Coyne, who had some important things to say in his opportunity to speak to the public. He said:

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So this is not remotely a budget bill, despite its name. It is what is known as an omnibus bill. If you want to know how far Parliament has fallen, how little real oversight it now exercises over government, this should give you a clue....But there is something quite alarming about Parliament being obliged to rubber-stamp the government's whole legislative agenda at one go.

My friends from the Liberal corner of the House have been a little cute in their motion today because they have chosen to be supportive of the old version of the Prime Minister. When he was the member for Calgary West, he raised similar concerns over a much smaller omnibus bill. Now the government will try to slide those things away and say that it was a different context and a different time.

• (1125)

However, it is a good moment for New Democrats, as the official opposition, in seeking to renew and restore the faith that Canadians need to have in this parliamentary system and to be able to see the Liberals, now out of power, saying, "*Mea culpa*, we apologize for past abuses of power with this tactic", which the Liberal House leader said today. They are sorry, in effect, but we have seen that movie before from Liberals. When in power, they go one way and then they get out of power and they realize the error of their ways and seek forgiveness from the public, it is a "one more time, please" notion. That is fine, but it is good to admit errors in judgment.

The Conservatives, when in opposition, had significant problems. We have quotes from the Minister of Canadian Heritage, from the Minister of National Defence and from virtually the entire front bench of the Conservative cabinet saying that this was an abuse of power when the Liberals did it. Now that the Conservatives are in power, this is okay, and in fact they will double down.

The only excuse the Conservatives have is that Liberals did it, but that is not much of a bar. That should not be the standard for them to say that the people they used to fight, they used to disagree with and fundamentally argue with, did things that were wrong, that this would justify them doing those same things, and in fact, making them worse by increasing the scope and scale, as they did last spring, in a bill of more than 400 pages that affected 70 acts of Parliament.

At one point, we were voting through changes in Canadian law at a rate of every seven to eight minutes. If Conservative members of Parliament actually took their jobs seriously and if they understood the fundamental nature of their jobs, they would hold government to account, including their own government. To suggest they had some comprehension of what they did every seven minutes, some understanding of what the impacts would be on fisheries, on employment insurance, on Canadian pensions, on the environmental assessment process, all things the Conservatives did not run on, but felt comfortable voting for with at such a frequency in rate, suggests they were all legislative geniuses. It suggests they were up all night, cramming page after page of all the implications in the assessments. We heard from people, both experts in those fields, be it in energy, fisheries, the environment or pension security, that these changes would have some significant and potentially very damaging consequences, people who are experts in the field of this place and in democracy.

I will quote Dr. Errol Mendes from the University of Ottawa, who said:

We are transferring responsible government under the centuries-old tradition of parliamentary democracy into PMO (Prime Minister's Office) government. And with PMO government, we have one-man government.

Dr. Errol Mendes is no radical. He has spent a lot of time studying, considering the ebb and flow of politics and the health and strength of our democracy, not just in Canada, but around the world. He and other experts agree about the path the government is taking us down as a nation. This is not just about an election cycle or one particular party's interest in ramming through a budget or a particular piece of legislation, this is about the general trend and trajectory of where our democracy goes.

Then for any Conservative to go out in the next campaign and lament that only 60% of Canadians come out to vote, meanwhile, showing such disdain for this place and for the roles that all members of Parliament face, is hypocrisy of the highest form. Whatever our political divisions on any given issue, be it the environment, or the economy or social programs, those are all well and good. However, on the exchanges that we need to have over the health and sanctity of our democratic principles, is where we should find that common ground. We should find that place where we say that the supremacy of Parliament is absolute.

It is not up to a prime minister, be he or she in a majority or minority position, to ram through legislation that has nothing to do with what the title or description of the legislation should be. There should be some holding, regardless of an individual's political orientation, to a belief that democracy still counts, that Parliament still matters.

A government that has broken every record in parliamentary history on closure and shutting down debate has nothing to be proud of with respect to that. The Conservatives have destroyed that common ground place to which Conservatives and progressives alike should aspire. We support the motion presented by my colleague from Montreal. We support the notion of them being in some sort of reform program and learning that what they did in the past is wrong and that has somehow opened up a precedence for this abuse of power to get worse and worse.

One does lament what the future is with the Conservative government. One does have hope, though, for progressives across the country who are uniting under the NDP banner and understanding that there is something better, something more to expect from our political leadership than this abuse of power that we so often see from the government today.

• (1130)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, we do agree that we need to find limits on the misuse of omnibus legislation. It is not, as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons would have it, a matter of procedure or political games. The motion before us today is, at its essence, about democracy. I commend to my hon. friend this quote from Professor Ned Franks, one of the leading political scientists in Canada, professor emeritus at Queen's University, who wrote that,

"...budget implementation acts...have morphed from short bills dealing with minor items...to enormous bills".

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He said:

These omnibus budget implementation bills subvert and evade the normal principles of parliamentary review of legislation.

As such, they are at the heart of respect for Westminster parliamentary tradition. I am not going to cite any specific examples of the misuse of an omnibus bill, of which there have been many, but most of them have been in recent years: the 700-page omnibus bill of 2009, the enormous omnibus bill of 2010 and, of course, the most recent one this spring.

I think my hon. friend's speech has already answered the question of whether we need to get this to a committee. How quickly can we get this to a committee? When can we set these limits?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, there are two places where these limits get to be set. One is that, with the good intentions and hope of all members of Parliament, we would suspect that the government would be open to this. This is something that can happen through the Conservatives' voting for this motion today, and they clearly are vitriolic in their opposition to anything that would curtail any of their power whatsoever, any sensible or reasonable conversation about limitations on power. The Conservatives think it might need to be absolute.

The second place, and this is an important one, is the effort we make beyond this chamber to talk to our constituents. We know some Conservatives actually heard from their constituents and agreed with them that the last iteration of this omnibus bill, this abuse of power, was something that should have been broken up, that it was incomprehensible and not justifiable in its massive form. The member of Parliament from British Columbia who had that moment of reflection, new to the Conservative caucus, had his mind changed for him within a number of hours. I lament that, because we should all be meeting with our constituents and reflecting their interests, not reflecting what the PMO thinks back to them, which is so common a case with my Conservative colleagues.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, going back to the last answer that the House Leader of the Official Opposition gave with respect to new members of Parliament, I too am a new member of Parliament. When I came here, I thought that one excellent opportunity for me to make a contribution was at committee. I am on the veterans affairs committee, and the last omnibus bill actually had provisions in it that amended legislation that affects veterans. I was of the understanding when I came here that one of the roles for committee members was to debate changes to legislation that comes under the purview of the committee. We were denied that opportunity.

My question for the hon. member relates to the work of committees and the impact of omnibus legislation such as we have just seen on the very effectiveness and the mandate of members of Parliament here in their committee work.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the government makes great fanfare out of its support for troops but only when it is buying military equipment, not so much when the troops come back home as veterans. Only recently, with the clawbacks of social support that the Conservatives were doing to our veterans, did the government finally wake up and realize that the criticisms we as opposition have been offering from those veterans groups were real and authentic and things needed to be changed. It took forever, and veterans lost a lot

of money. We are now seeking some sort of justice and compensation for those veterans who were cut out by the government.

In terms of the committees, I lament my friend's and all of my colleagues' inability to actually address legislation, which is the highest role for a committee, but I lament more for those Canadians who want access to those committees to give their experience, expertise and testimony. It is not just those experts' ability to access, but the common, ordinary, everyday Canadians who want to get into the debate and want to enhance their democracy are shut out when the Conservatives ram so much together into one bill and shuffle it off to a finance committee that is ill equipped and without the time to actually study and understand the implications.

The government is ruling without evidence. It has cut the census. It cuts scientists. It cuts the idea that evidence should inform the decision, so that only Conservative ideology of a particular nature should inform the debate, whether it is veterans, the environment or everything on down the line. That is worrisome, not only to me and the New Democrats but to Canadians across the country.

• (1135)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the motion today by starting with the observation that there are effectively two points to this motion.

One is that the motion asks us to agree with some sentiments expressed several years ago, almost 20 years ago, by the member for Calgary Southwest, who is now the Prime Minister, with respect to a certain characteristic of what he called omnibus bills and what we are now discussing as omnibus bills in the current Parliament.

The second point is a concrete recommendation to have the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs study and report on exactly what omnibus bills are and how in fact they can be regulated within the confines of parliamentary procedure.

I will start with the second part and say simply that we would, I believe, benefit from such a study. It would clarify practice and allow a serious discussion of how bills called "omnibus", whether by the government or by the opposition, do or do not undermine parliamentary democracy and indeed democracy at large.

At minimum, through such a study there could be a debate, hopefully not in camera, on best practices without there needing to be a decision or recommendation to give more power to the Speaker to rule on a bill in terms of it being out of order or that it should be split. We could have a study on best practices that would actually share the sentiments of all members of this House about what ideal practice would look like. Then governments, including the present government in the years of its mandate and future governments, can make their own decisions about how they want to situate themselves within a best practices framework. That is all that this report need be. Therefore, I certainly would like to commend this second part of the motion to the House.

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On the substance of the issue and the specific reasons for which the motion refers to omnibus bills as problematic, it is clear that the point of order raised by the member for Calgary Southwest in 1994 talks about the problem of diversity of content in what he was calling an omnibus bill. Members should remember that this was a 21-page bill versus the almost 500-page bill that we received, which passed the House in the spring, and a much larger bill that we hear will be coming at us. However, on the 21-page bill, he says:

How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

His concern was that members of the House should be able to vote on specific issues more often than is permitted when omnibus bills, or something resembling omnibus bills, become standard practice. He sees it as a question of accountability to constituents.

I would suggest that it could also end up in the context of some kinds of bills being a question of conscience. There may be elements in a bill that members would very definitely want to vote for or against and want that known and on record.

It is certainly the case that the commentator from Postmedia, Andrew Coyne, also sees it in this way when he says:

But lately the practice has been to throw together all manner of bills involving wholly different responsibilities of government in one all-purpose “budget implementation” bill, and force MPs to vote up or down on the lot. While the 2012 budget implementation bill is hardly the first in this tradition, the scale and scope is on a level not previously seen, or tolerated.... We have no idea whether MPs supported or opposed any particular bill in the bunch....

● (1140)

Keep in mind that 70 pieces of legislation were amended in the recent Bill C-38.

He goes on to say: “...only that they voted for the legislation that contained them”.

This is the concern specifically referenced in the motion, and it is a real concern for the reasons given by the Prime Minister in his former capacity as solely the member for Calgary Southwest, and as Mr. Coyne has just articulated the question.

It is also important to know that there is another dimension to this that is at least as worrisome. That is the subsequent use that governments or MPs from the government party make of an omnibus bill in their debates and references in the House, quite commonly in ripostes in question period. What will they do? An MP from the opposition will raise a question in question period on unemployment insurance or on food safety. Lo and behold, a minister will stand up, give some sort of answer and say that “In any case, you're the party that voted against” this, that or the other measure. “You're the person who did so, because you voted with your party”. What they are almost always referring to when that tactic is used is budget implementation bills. We know this.

We in the House know there can be many features of a budget implementation bill that everyone is perfectly happy to see and support. Almost always, when ministers answer in that way their reference points are precisely the provisions that accord a hundred per cent with the sentiments and policy of the opposition. The opposition would have voted for it if given the chance to vote separately. The government knows this.

Omnibus bills are dovetailing with what is effectively, and what we all know to be increasingly, a deliberate strategy of misdirection and indeed mistruth on the part of the government.

We must be very clear that this practice of responding to questions in this way, by attributing votes against matters that members of Parliament are perfectly in favour of, is very much a combination of deliberate party tactics. I hesitate to say this, but it is becoming more apparent that it is a culture and mindset that is taking over the government party. It is a mindset of complete subservience to a Prime Minister's Office and an approach that really plays fast and loose with the truth and demands that its MPs fall in line with that strategy.

Even today, the House leader managed to bring it up at one point in his response to a speech. He parroted the exact same nonsense we have been hearing for a month now with respect to a carbon tax. Why, I would ask, would so many respected journalists take to print over the last month to speak out on exactly this particular tactic of using the carbon tax spectre by the government, this culture of misdirection and mistruth? It is because they know that something profound is underway in terms of the extent to which untruth is becoming part of the democratic fabric of the country, to the point that we cannot talk about a democratic fabric if it takes hold as deeply as it is starting to.

I would add two final points about the democratic problems. One is the problem that committees cannot achieve any kind of scrutiny of omnibus bills. We have to take into account how democracy is profoundly limited by lack of scrutiny. We also have to understand that omnibus bills end up being a game of cat and mouse or even catch me if you can, because of how much time is spent just trying to understand what is hidden and buried in the bill.

● (1145)

Finally, we have to understand the role of the media. The media too need to be able to understand, report and critically discuss bills. In a world where we have media concentration and fewer and fewer journalists dedicated to this kind of enterprise, their task as part of the democratic enterprise is more and more compromised by the practice of omnibus bills.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend from Toronto—Danforth for putting it so clearly the chilling lack of respect for democracy, even in the government's response in the debate today. I am deeply saddened as a result of that.

I thought today's motion would be an opportunity by the Liberal Party for us to revisit the difficulties the Speaker has faced. I raised these issues in a point of order on June 4. I believe, with all due respect for the Speaker, whose ruling I am not challenging, that there is enough in our jurisprudence from previous Speaker's rulings to find that certain omnibus bills are out of order because they fail to have a unifying theme or central purpose in the way the legislation is brought forward.

Accepting the Speaker's ruling, as parliamentarians we now have an obligation to find a way to set some limits around omnibus legislation. Accordingly, I thank my friend from Toronto—Danforth for an extremely well prepared contribution to today's debate.

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Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands that Speakers are working within the framework of very confining rules about how far he or she can go in challenging the approach the government has taken with respect to what we are calling omnibus bills. That I why I think the study could be useful. As I indicated in my speech, the purpose should be about best practices and not necessarily one of giving additional power to the Speaker to challenge what governments are presenting.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has given a very clear speech on what is happening with our parliamentary democracy.

The concerns have not just been raised in the House. I was going through some mail, which I want to share with my colleagues. I received a card signed by four constituents in my riding: Hannah, Sofia, Natasha and Dom. They said they had been very upset with the way Bill C-38 had been debated and how there were so many things in that bill. They said, “Thank you for standing up for democracy”.

As a fairly new MP, I have been really disturbed by the lack of parliamentary debate and the shutting down of the voices of members of Parliament.

What steps does my colleague think can be taken to make sure that we do not keep facing bills the size of the phone books of a very large city?

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, the answer simply lies in a change of practice on the part of government. As we are currently structured, it cannot come from the Speaker. There may be some more room for Speakers to challenge certain kinds of bills but I will not go any further on that point.

We need to have governments, if they have a comprehensive vision, willing to present legislation either in one bunch or as a series of parallel bills that would go to specific committees with the expertise and the time to study the diverse aspects of the bill, which cannot be properly studied if they only go to a finance committee or to one subcommittee hurriedly put together at the last minute.

One of the key issues is how a government channels a very large and complex bill into the committee process. If the government does that differently, the size and complexity of the bill becomes a very different issue.

• (1150)

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver Quadra.

I rise today to speak to the Liberal opposition motion calling on the House to do the following:

[I]nstruct the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to study what reasonable limits should be placed on the consideration of omnibus legislation and that the Committee report back its findings, including specific recommendations for legislative measures or changes to the Standing Orders, no later than December 10, 2012.

To fully understand our motion, let us begin by examining what an omnibus bill is. Chapter 16, page 724 of O'Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, explains:

[T]here is no precise definition of an omnibus bill. In general, an omnibus bill seeks to amend, repeal or enact several initiatives.

Citing Speaker Fraser's ruling of June 8, 1988, O'Brien and Bosc further state that an omnibus has:

—one basic principle or purpose which ties together all the proposed enactments and thereby renders a bill intelligible for parliamentary purposes.

As Canadians await the impending sequel to the Conservative government's March omnibus bill, they clearly remember Bill C-38. Under the guise of implementing the budget, this 425-page Conservative omnibus bill amended more than 70 individual acts affecting an extensive list of departments, including 150 pages dedicated to gutting critical environmental protections and drastically changing the employment insurance program.

We can look at the media's response to this; it is not just Canadians from coast to coast to coast. An editorial in the *Globe and Mail* stated:

The federal government's 452-page omnibus budget bill contains too much for adequate consideration by Parliament, because it is really more than budget-implementation legislation. Only some portions of it are about public finance, that is, about such matters as income tax, sales tax and federal-provincial fiscal arrangements.

Another editorial in the *Toronto Star* said:

This is political sleight-of-hand and message control, and it appears to be an accelerating trend. These shabby tactics keep Parliament in the dark, swamp MPs with so much legislation that they can't absorb it all, and hobble scrutiny. This is not good, accountable, transparent government. It is not what Harper promised to deliver.

The Deputy Speaker: I would point out to the hon. member not to use the name of any other member of Parliament. Please address them by their position or riding.

Ms. Judy Foote: It was a quote, Mr. Speaker, an editorial in the *Toronto Star*, but I appreciate—

The Deputy Speaker: The fact that it is a quote does not justify the use of the name.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, by throwing everything but the kitchen sink into this omnibus bill, the Conservatives have attempted to pull a fast one on Canadians, hoping that they would not take the time to consider each devastating page of the bill.

Fortunately, Canadians were not fooled and have expressed their outrage at the Conservative government by encouraging this motion today. Indeed, when we had the Liberal opposition introducing 500 amendments in an attempt to have the bill divided so that it could be voted on properly, we know that we and other parties were hearing from Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the Conservatives used their majority to push through the bill without amendment anyway.

That brings us to today, days before the Conservatives are set to introduce a follow-up omnibus bill rumoured to be even larger and more expansive than its predecessor.

While omnibus bills may present an easy opportunity for governments to introduce complex legislation affecting multiple acts, they are not always the most democratic approach. Lumping dozens of individual pieces of legislation together limits the ability of a voter to hold his or her member of Parliament to account by forcing a member's wide-ranging opinion into a simplistic yes or no.

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For example, we expect the next Conservative omnibus bill to make substantive changes to parliamentary pensions. Let me be clear: I support reductions to parliamentary pensions, including my own, so they better reflect the Canadian standard. I think that is the fair and right thing to do. However, if the Conservatives decide, for instance, to include measures in their omnibus legislation that would continue their pattern of dismantling search and rescue in my province, Newfoundland and Labrador, then I would have a real difficulty supporting that particular piece of legislation. I made a commitment to my constituents to oppose any measures that would risk the lives of those who make their living at sea and I intend to keep that commitment.

Herein lies the dilemma with omnibus legislation. In such a circumstance, if I chose to support the reduction in parliamentary pensions, then I would also be forced to break a separate commitment to my constituents. That is why Liberals believe that measures to change the pensions of members of Parliament should be introduced through separate legislation so we have the opportunity to vote in favour of it. We have raised this point both in and outside the House of Commons time and time again, calling upon the government in fact to introduce a different piece of legislation with respect to the pensions of members of Parliament.

In the end, the Conservatives will undoubtedly continue their history of partisan gamesmanship and will predictably include these pension measures in their omnibus legislation, not because it is easier and because the pension measures are related to the budget, but because they can falsely claim that we did not support reducing our pensions if we vote against their millions of dollars in advertising or raising of EI premiums on job creators.

They know that their assertion is patently untrue, but they also know that it will make it easy for them to give stock answers in question period, as my colleague referenced in his earlier remarks. When we are holding the Conservatives to account for reckless policies, it gives the government the opportunity to stand and say, "Well, you voted against it".

This scheme is insulting to the intellect of Canadians and is, at its heart, intentionally misleading. However, do not take my word for it. Let us listen to what the current Prime Minister, the right hon. member for Calgary Southwest, said in response to an omnibus bill on March 25, 1994:

—I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.

Keep in mind that the bill the member for Calgary Southwest thought was too diverse at that time to hold a single vote on was only 21 pages long. Twenty-one pages is less than 5% of the length of the last Conservative omnibus bill the Prime Minister introduced.

• (1155)

Ironically, the Prime Minister's reservations could not be more relevant than to his own omnibus legislation. The same Prime Minister who now tries to use an omnibus bill to sneak substantive legislation past Canadians previously asked:

How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

We can agree with some of the measures but oppose others. How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse?

He went on to suggest the following:

Dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill.

That is exactly what we are saying in our opposition day motion today. What the Prime Minister said in 1994 is exactly where we are coming from today. I would like to think that his view would still be applicable today if he were to be asked the question. Unfortunately, that is not the case and we are finding ourselves having to introduce this private member's motion dealing with omnibus legislation because of the actions of the government.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, which has evoked a reaction, because the Conservatives' bill was an attack on democracy.

Earlier, we heard the Conservatives say that they had agreed to hours of debate and consultations. However, they failed to mention, and they are unwilling to admit, that almost all the experts who appeared before the committee said that the bill should be split. Amendments were proposed, but none of the Conservatives agreed to them, as was mentioned.

How is this respectful? What better approach can we take so that this type of bill is never brought forward again?

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, we are clearly finding ourselves in a situation where, if we do not all come together and recognize that this is the wrong way to go, then we are going to find ourselves in this situation as long as the government is in power.

The procedure and House affairs committee can look at this, with representation from all parties in the House, to try to change the way we have been dealing with legislation, particularly legislation that is so large, considering that the last omnibus bill included 70 acts. We need to come together and work on this, recognizing that it puts members of Parliament in a very difficult position when they are being asked to vote on one piece of legislation that covers so many topics; some of which we could never vote for and some of which we do not want to vote against.

This is why it is important for us to work together and for the procedure and House affairs committee to be asked to look at this and to find a way to make sure that members of the House of Commons are not put in a situation where we are dealing with legislation of this magnitude.

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Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today there were some comments made by the government House leader that caught my attention. People listening to this debate at home who are long-time supporters of the Liberal Party of Canada are on to the fact that these guys are abusing Parliament. Long-time supporters of the New Democratic Party understand fully that the government has abused the chamber and its majority within the chamber. This debate is really targeted at independence and some conservative-minded people or Conservative supporters who still have a high respect for democracy in this country and what goes on in the chamber.

The government House leader made reference to a ruling by then Speaker Gilbert Parent on a point of order by the current Prime Minister when he was questioning the use of omnibus legislation. In the ruling he said it is okay to amend several statutes, but in fact—

•(1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member's time has expired. He has five seconds to put the question.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, does the member think 400 pages of information, 735 clauses, 70 acts of Parliament and 60 distinct measures are an abuse of this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. A short answer from the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has noted, this is really not about democracy at all.

Today, the government House leader foolishly told Canadians not to concern themselves with procedure. It is crazy for the government House leader to say such a thing in Parliament, where we are all about procedure and making things happen in the right way and ensuring that what is discussed in the House among MPs of all parties should be about democracy.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to speak to this Liberal motion on omnibus bills today and to why there should be a committee to review and report on how they may be used properly.

Omnibus bills are intended to be a tool for matters of housekeeping and efficiency, for grouping minor and uncontroversial updates into one place. They have a role. As a minister, I have used omnibus bills as they are intended to be used. They are intended to facilitate parliamentary debate by bringing together all the minor technical and administrative amendments to legislation that arise from a single policy decision, which is the critical part in how far Parliament and the Prime Minister have strayed.

I will not pretend that the phenomenon of abusive omnibus bills being used to bundle the major and consequential changes of numerous policy decisions is a new one, but I will contend that under the current government it has become an unparalleled expression of contempt for Canadians and a tool for the dismantling of a core principle of our democracy, that of Parliament's accountability to constituents.

In 2005, under another government, the budget bill was 120 pages long and at the time it was a record length. The opposition leader of the day, now the right hon. Prime Minister, asked:

How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation...?

Exactly, is what I would say.

He denounced omnibus bills as undemocratic and a “contradiction to the conventions and practices of the House”. That is exactly so.

Therefore, I would ask today's Prime Minister where his integrity was regarding Bill C-38, his omnibus bill, presented last spring? If his words of 2005 indeed expressed his convictions, I would ask this. What happened to his convictions?

Members were forced last June to vote on a block of legislation four times the length and with 400 times the impact on Canadians compared to the omnibus bill that he so decried in 2005. Why did the Prime Minister do that and why is he preparing another such travesty of an omnibus bill that is expected to be presented this fall? Why is his tactic, this misuse of omnibus bills, so wrong? Because it does not allow parliamentarians to do their jobs for the people they represent.

Let us look at Bill C-38 for a moment. It is 452 pages long, has 753 clauses and amends 70 different acts. First and foremost, it is an abuse of democracy to lump together such an array of massive policy change. Permit me to list a few examples.

Bill C-38 increases government's power over people's lives in many domains, such as immigration, access to employment insurance, pensions and industrial developments in people's backyards, to name a few.

As Bill C-38 increases ministers' individual powers over individual people's lives, it reduces the very accountability mechanisms that make sure these powers are not being abused. That is scary stuff indeed.

The breadth of policy change in Bill C-38 is breathtaking, such as changes to the very fabric of financial security for seniors, changes in justice that are fundamental to Canada's immigration intake process, and changes to our critical environmental safety net.

Bill C-38 gave Revenue Canada \$8 million a year in extra money to intimidate and punish environmental and other not-for-profit organizations that dare to speak up in the public interest. How many Canadians wanted that? How many Canadians thought they were voting for that? That is 10 times the dollars that the government claims it will be saving by eliminating the Kitsilano Coast Guard search and rescue base in the heart of the busiest harbour in Canada. Many of my constituents, every one that I have heard from, is angry about the closure of that base because they know that it will lead to preventable deaths.

Therefore, Bill C-38 was an attack on democracy, an attack on the environment and an attack on Canadian values and the Canadian people. To lump these fundamental rewrites of policy and practice into a single bill that cannot be properly examined, understood, debated, communicated nor amended is an abuse of democratic principles. That abuse of democracy must end.

• (1210)

The Prime Minister used to agree with me on that but that was then and this is now. I would contend that the government's reliance on omnibus budget bills is a symptom of an underlying condition, the condition of contempt. This has been amply proven. The government has contempt for democracy, contempt for Parliament, contempt for the rule of the law, contempt for civil society and contempt for Canadians.

Canada is a country built on hard work, responsibility, freedom, equality, opportunity, compassion and respect for one another. Those are deep Liberal values but also Canadian values. Canada is a country in which contempt by its leaders for its people has no place. With Canada's history of sacrifice in defence of democracy, we must never forget that Parliament is important. What we do here and how we do it matters.

[Translation]

Having a healthy democracy is the Canadian way. Having a government that is accountable for its actions and decisions is the Canadian way. Having transparent processes and procedures is the Canadian way. Having a government that gives people the opportunity to get involved in politics and to participate in decisions that affect them is the Canadian way.

On the flip side, omnibus bills are an affront to democracy. They are an affront to Canada's political traditions. They are an affront to the rights of our people. There is a constitutional problem with omnibus bills because the legal boundaries are unclear. There is also a problem at the political level.

However, there are solutions. I am looking at the scope of the task ahead of us. The committee is just the first step.

[English]

The committee must do its work but that is just the first step. The committee must find out how this kind of abuse is prevented in other western Liberal democracies. It must propose changes to tighten up the latitude that exists for abusing omnibus bills and apply accountability that does not exist today.

We must ask ourselves this question: Is there not something fundamentally wrong with an electoral system, Canada's electoral system, in which 25% of eligible voters can provide a governing party with a majority, a government that can then proceed to make the kinds of major policy changes we saw in Bill C-38 without due process, without respect, with contempt and with impunity?

I can picture a day when our electoral system will strengthen democratic accountability and not weaken it. I can picture a day when the proportion of each party's public representatives in this place will more closely reflect the will of the voters. I can picture this renewed Canadian democracy creating the incentive for parliamentarians to really work together across party lines on the big

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challenges of the day. It is time to have that conversation with Canadians. How we elect our Parliament, how we govern ourselves, how we include and consult, and how we write and debate our legislation says something important about Canada and the kind of people Canadians want to be.

The government's abuse of omnibus bills represents secrecy, contempt, exclusion and meanness. That is not Canada, that is not who Canadians are and that means this abuse of power must be fixed. We can start right now by voting in favour of the Liberal motion to end the misuse of omnibus legislation.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again I thank the Liberal member for bringing up everything that is despicable, disrespectful and anti-democratic in the omnibus bill introduced by the Conservatives and the upcoming bill that they are supposed to be introducing this week, which is even bigger, even thicker and probably even more controversial.

I recall that, between 1993 and 2006, the Liberals also introduced 14 omnibus bills, which is one per year. Now they are rising to criticize this practice. I would think they recognized that this was also anti-democratic.

Why is it worse now than when they were in power?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for her question.

I already mentioned that there were omnibus bills at the time. They were much shorter. There were fewer political issues and no controversial issues. What we are seeing now is an outright abuse of the process, and it is time for that to stop.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would caution my NDP colleague not to be sucked in by the talking points of the government. We are talking apples and oranges: a 21-page budget bill versus a 400-page budget bill. Do not fall for that stuff.

I would ask my colleague what aspects of the budget would have benefited from a full and thorough investigation by committee.

The fact is that the Conservatives now have a piece of legislation at the human resources committee, Bill C-44, which would impact about 6,000 Canadians. The bill received the unanimous consent of the House and it is now in committee for full hearings with witnesses and testimony. However, on something like working while on claim, which they have just made a mess of and impacts 900,000 Canadians, it gets flushed through in this omnibus bill.

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Since the Conservatives have royally jiggered up working while on claim, what other aspects of the bill spring to mind that may have been tweaked a little had it had the opportunity to go to committee?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, what immediately springs to mind for British Columbians or any Canadian who wants a strong economy that protects and restores of the environment without degrading it, are the changes to the Environmental Assessment Act. We saw a massive erasing of 30 years of thoughtful process to assess the potential impacts of development and to provide direction as to how development could take place in a way that would not impact the environment. This was very useful public policy that has been undermined completely. There will be 3,000 environmental assessments a year that will no longer take place.

I do want to add that it is bad for business. We see what happens when an industry does not have the trust of the public, thanks to the intervention by the Conservative government which undermines the trust of the public in the protection of the environment with the kinds of measures that Bill C-38 highlighted.

• (1220)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and speak against the motion brought forward today. I know my Liberal colleagues will be shocked at that but I do take exception to some of the comments that have been made here this morning and I will reflect on those.

To sum it up, we on this side of the House recognize that not only the Canadian economy but the economies of the world are in a fragile recovery mode right now and so it takes comprehensive plans to ensure we can deal with that fragile recovery. I would argue, and I will go on to explain why, that comprehensive legislation is required to enact a comprehensive plan.

We tabled a comprehensive budget early in the spring and it requires comprehensive legislation to enact that, just like it has for every other budget that has been tabled in this House throughout the years. There is nothing different about it. A government puts forward a budget that is actually the plan for the government and that plan impacts different pieces of legislation that need to be changed. That is exactly what was done in the first budget implementation act and we will see the continuation of that in the second budget implementation act. Because of that, I would argue that Canada, because of this comprehensive plan, is in the good recovery mode that it is in.

We have actually helped our businesses create jobs and grow the economy. On March 29, our government introduced the 2012 budget, the economic action plan 2012. It is a prudent and long-term plan to grow Canada's economy, create jobs and return to balanced budgets. When discussing this plan, we must consider it in a global context, as I referred to earlier. Thanks to the help of our Conservative government's economic leadership, Canada has fared much better than all of our G7 counterparts.

I will go through some of the examples. First and foremost, since July 2009, and I spoke to the job recovery, we now have 820,000 net new jobs, which is, by far, the strongest job growth record among all of the G7 countries. That is because we have a comprehensive plan and because we put forward legislation to enact that plan.

Second, more than 90% of all those jobs created since July 2009 are full-time positions and more than 75% of them are in the private sector.

Third, both the IMF and the OECD project that Canada will have among the strongest growth in the G7 countries in the years ahead.

Fourth, for the fifth year in a row, the World Economic Forum has ranked Canada's financial system as the safest and the soundest in the world. Our comprehensive budget implementation bills helped reaffirm that.

Fifth, three credit rating agencies, Moody's, Fitch and Standard & Poor's, have all recently reaffirmed Canada's top-tier triple-A credit rating. In fact, it was Fitch that recently praised Canada when it said:

Years of fiscal responsibility and a strong institutional setting created the conditions for an effective fiscal policy response to the global financial crisis. An early commitment to balance the budget over the medium term placed Canada's fiscal credibility ahead of many peers.

The list goes on, but the global economy does remain fragile and it is a different story than we see here in Canada.

• (1225)

In Europe, tremendous economic challenges remain, of which we are reminded all too frequently. The eurozone's real GDP contracted in the fourth quarter of 2011, was virtually flat in the first quarter of 2012 and has since contracted again in the second quarter of 2012. The most recent indicators out of Greece indicate that unemployment is about 25% and Spain is not far behind.

In budget implementation act one, we addressed those issues. That was a comprehensive legislation that needed to address EI and we did that.

In short, the situation is not pretty in some European countries and that is why their leaders need to firmly and permanently deal with their economic problem. The recent announcement by the European Central Bank in support of the European sovereign bond markets is a step in the right direction—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize to the hon. minister across the way, but I feel his speech, while fascinating in terms of the fates of European governments, strays quite far from the question before us, which is does the House not need to express itself, meet in committee and find some way to provide rules and guidelines so that omnibus bills of all manner do not stray from one single purpose. I do not hear in the minister's speech any reflection of the question before the House.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, not very much of this speech actually reflects on the European situation. We can certainly expand on that, but I would suggest I am drawing a link. The lack of being able to pass legislation to actually react to the world economic crisis is why Europe is still having trouble and I am trying to explain that we do need the comprehensive legislation that was passed in the House in the spring. We need a second one. We have more to do yet and I would suggest that everything I am talking about is actually drawn back to why we need to table, discuss and pass comprehensive legislation.

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I thank both the Minister of State for Finance and the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for their interventions. I understand that the question of relevance arose earlier this morning prior to my taking the chair at noon. I would like to make two points. The first is a general point and the second is more specific.

In general terms, there are rules in the Standing Orders that relate to relevance and repetition. It is fair to say that over the years chair occupants have taken a rather wide view of those two matters for the reason that the Chair does not want to unduly limit debate in the House and the opportunity for members to bring the facts that they feel are important or relevant to bear. There are times when the Chair asks members to come back to the matter at hand, but over the eight plus years that I have been in this place, I think it is fair to say that the Chair has taken a relatively wide view of the question of relevance. I think it is also fair to say that when members give a 10 or 20 minute speech, they will often use examples and make arguments that wander away from the principal matter before the House, but it is their responsibility to somehow connect it back to the question at hand.

I would encourage all hon. members to do two things.

First, when members make a presentation to the House, they be mindful of the business before the House and they be respectful of that business as well as the process. This place will function better if all hon. members make a good faith effort to do that.

Second, I would also remind all hon. members that wishing for a much narrower definition of what is relevant and wishing for the Chair to take a much narrower definition of that would have consequences beyond the matter before the House at that time.

I would ask all hon. members if they could balance those two principles. Again, it has been my experience that most of the time members do this very well. While some members take a circuitous route to come to the matter at hand, most of the time they do that.

I have a more specific comment. I have reviewed the blues from earlier today. When the question of relevance arose and when the hon. minister of state rose to speak, I listened very carefully to what he said in order to measure the relevance. Without getting into the substance of the debate before the House today, there is a question of the relevance of omnibus or comprehensive legislation and at what point that becomes inappropriate. The more specific suggestion is that the House ought to refer this to procedure and House affairs committee so it can come back with a ruling.

I heard the minister of state say that he disagreed with the motion before the House today, that he felt that omnibus or comprehensive legislation was not inherently unacceptable or inappropriate in this place. He further argued that matters such as the budget and budget implementation bills were by necessity broad in scope and that it was on that basis that he would vote against the motion.

Subsequently, my expectation is that the minister of state is bringing specific examples to light of how he feels, essentially making the argument that comprehensive legislation is in fact necessary and therefore suggesting that it is inappropriate and that the rules ought to be changed. He disagrees with that proposal. I

respect the fact that there are other members in the House who would disagree with his point of view.

With that, I would ask the hon. Minister of State for Finance to continue, to be mindful of the question of relevance and to focus on the matter that is before the House, which is the opposition motion, and to move toward the end of his speech.

● (1230)

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, you do reaffirm my belief in the wisdom of the Chair. I can do this on a very repetitious basis, drawing every example I use back to the fact that it requires comprehensive legislation. If the opposition wishes that I do that, I may fall into what you have suggested is not appropriate, and that is repetitiveness. I will try not to do that either.

What I was speaking about was Europe and the threat to the global economy, the indecisions, the lack of a comprehensive plan among the European Union community.

I will go back to my first statement that a comprehensive plan requires comprehensive legislation. That is what the budget implementation act, Bill C-38, was. I suggest there will be comprehensive legislation following soon to implement the rest of a comprehensive plan to keep Canada on track.

Another example I would use is in the U.S. There seems to be some indecision down there, a lack of being able to make a firm decision, perhaps a lack of a comprehensive plan such as we had in Bill C-38, which was a comprehensive legislation.

The U.S. needs to get its fiscal house in order. We are well on our way to doing that. It also needs to ensure that there is certainty in the short term so markets and investors can be confident that economic growth will not be interrupted. That is what we saw in our comprehensive legislation in the spring.

In these uncertain times, Canada's economic stability depends on the implementation of a clear plan, a comprehensive plan to safeguard our economy. This situation demands that Canada cannot be complacent. We cannot allow political gridlock and instability to stall vital economic and fiscal reforms as we are witnessing in the U. S. and Europe.

Moreover, in a rapidly changing and global marketplace where Canada faces tough competition from emerging economies like Brazil, Russia, China and India, we cannot afford to delay action to support our economy and measures to return to balanced budgets.

Therefore, in budget implementation one, Bill C-38, we actually put forward solutions to allow our Canadian companies to compete.

I think the argument is very valid, that in order for our economy to continue to grow, we need to put in place legislation and we need to do that soon. We gathered it together in a budget implementation act and we will have the second one coming soon that actually does that. It will allow our Canadian companies to compete internationally, to be able to export their resources, to streamline that process and to ensure that it is an environmentally sound plan. That is all part of our comprehensive budget plan.

Business of Supply

The challenges that our economy faces are not small and one dimensional and neither is our plan. It is comprehensive and ambitious. It responds to the magnitude of the threats that Canada faces in this uncertain climate today.

In order to implement the plan, certain measures require legislation to be adopted by Parliament. In April 2012, we introduced Bill C-38, the one I would suggest the Liberals are referring to here today, which included provisions to spur job growth, to keep social programs sustainable, to eliminate wasteful and duplicative spending of taxpayer dollars and much more, hence, the comprehensive budget implementation bill.

Let me give the members opposite some examples of this action and explain how we plan on spurring job growth. One is by developing our resources responsibly. The NDP, when it comes to resources, has suggested it would like to implement a job-killing carbon scheme that would increase the price of absolutely everything we buy and consume. That was not part of our plan and it never will be.

● (1235)

Our government knows that this would not work. Instead, we are focused on responsible resource development, which will streamline the review process for major economic projects by providing predictable timelines for project approvals. It will prevent long delays that kill potential jobs and stall economic growth by putting valuable investments at risk. Most important, responsible resource development will create good, skilled, well-paying jobs in cities and communities all across this great country while at the same time maintaining the highest possible standards for protecting the environment. That required a comprehensive piece of legislation, Bill C-38.

With emerging economies in Asia and around the world providing the potential to create even more jobs and growth, our government will act swiftly to implement its plan for responsible resource development in the interests of the Canadian economy.

However, that is not all, as we have much more to do. We are making employment insurance a more efficient program, one that is focused on job creation and opportunities by removing disincentives to work and supporting unemployed Canadians.

We are also helping build a fast and flexible economic immigration system to meet Canada's labour market needs by reducing the backlog in the federal skilled worker program, returning applications and refunding fees to those who applied prior to February 27, 2008.

Our government is also making fiscally responsible decisions to ensure that spending stays in check and does not go down the path that we have seen in many European countries. To help achieve this we are modernizing Canada's currency by gradually eliminating the penny from Canada's coinage system. This as well requires changes to legislation and is why we table comprehensive legislation. This alone will save taxpayers \$11 million every year.

Nonetheless, this plan is about much more than reducing spending. As a government we have a responsibility to Canadians to ensure that Canada's social programs remain sustainable over the long term. That is why in budget 2012 we took action to ensure that

the retirement security of all Canadians, now and into the future, is sound by placing Canada's old age security program on a sustainable path. Beginning in April of 2023, the age of eligibility for OAS and the guaranteed income supplement will gradually begin to increase from 65 to 67. These changes reflect demographic shifts in Canada's population and are necessary to ensure that OAS and GIS are available for future generations of Canadians. This also requires comprehensive legislation so that we can enact the necessary changes to make both of these programs sustainable.

The problem with the members opposite is that they do not think down the road; they do not realize the changes that we need to make to make sure that these programs stay sustainable.

Our government is taking real action to ensure that Canada's economy continues to create jobs and grow. What, you may ask, does our government's plan do for Canadian families and communities? That would be one of the best questions to ask here today and I shall answer it.

I will talk about economic action plan 2012 and how it builds on our government's strong record by proposing new measures for Canadian families. For example, our action plan will improve the application of the GST and HST and income tax systems to a number of health care services, drugs and medical devices to reflect the evolving nature of the health care sector and to better meet the health care needs of Canadians.

● (1240)

That was required both in the comprehensive legislation that we passed and in legislation that will be forthcoming soon. Specifically, it would mean exempting from the GST and HST pharmacists' professional services, other than their prescription drug dispensing services, which are already zero-rated under the GST and HST.

It would also mean expanding the zero-rated treatment under the GST-HST for corrective eyeglasses or contact lenses supplied on the prescription of an eye-care professional to include corrective eyeglasses or contact lenses supplied on the order of a qualified optician who is authorized, under provincial law, to issue such an order.

It would mean expanding the list of health care professionals on whose orders certain medical and assistive devices are zero-rated under the GST and HST so as to reflect the increasing involvement of health care professionals, such as nurses, in giving orders for these devices.

It would also mean adding to the list of non-prescription drugs that are zero-rated under GST and HST.

It is obvious that we needed to open up the Income Tax Act to do that. It is part of the budget. It was referred to in the budget. It is part of our action plan. It requires comprehensive legislation to do that. That is just one of the reasons I will be opposing the motion today.

Business of Supply

It would also mean expanding the list of GST and HST zero-rated medical and assistive devices and the list of expenses a person may claim for income tax purposes under the medical expense tax credit to include such things as a blood coagulation monitor for use by people who require anti-coagulation therapy.

Every time I say zero-rated, I see a confused look on the faces of the opposition members. This is not surprising since we all know that the Liberals actually favour higher taxes. Perhaps that is why they actually opposed our budget implementation act, Bill C-38.

We know what the Liberals do when they have a chance to support initiatives that would lower taxes for Canadian families. We have seen example after example. They simply vote against these measures. That is exactly what they did with policies like the refundable working income tax benefit back in 2007. That is exactly what they did with our government's economic action plan.

Let us take a look at some of the initiatives that would also help Canadian communities but which the opposition also voted against.

Our government's plan would make direct investments in research that would support our communities. Canada's position as a world leader in research excellence is a key source of the discoveries, innovations and advanced skills that not only result in better health outcomes but also drive job creation and opportunities in the knowledge economy.

The measures in the economic action plan would help strengthen Canada's leadership position by supporting industry/academic research collaborations, as well as advanced health and public policy research initiatives of strategic importance. We all understand how important that is. The minister sitting near me here today is leading that incredible challenge, and we are winning on that.

We are announcing new chairs at universities and colleges across this country. Why is that? It is because we enacted legislation that would allow and fund that. We are proud of that record.

We have many examples. For example, in the area of health research, we have allocated \$15 million per year for patient-oriented research. That was part of Bill C-38, which the opposition voted against.

I could go on and on about all the things the opposition voted against. However, I think the fundamental comment I will finish with is that I am proud to oppose the opposition motion this morning. We have great reason to think we are on the right track.

• (1245)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand why the minister does not see this as a gross abuse of omnibus bills. When the Prime Minister was a member of the opposition in 1994 and faced a budget of 21 pages, he asked the government to split it in order for members to be able to focus on its different aspects. At that time, Canada was in a terrible economic situation.

The government now uses the economy as an excuse for deciding that the age of receipt of old age security will change from 65 to 67 in coming years, even though there is no hurry to do that, without having appropriate debate in the House. It also uses the economy to get rid of a lot of environmental protections that Canadians have.

What is the link between the difficulties in the economy and the arbitrary cancellation of thousands of immigration applications? What is the link between the economy and the government ending the requirement of the Auditor General to audit the financial statements of a series of agencies, including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency? What is the link between all of these things and the difficulties of the economy?

The Conservatives are abusing this argument to be able to say afterwards that the opposition voted against all of the things they proposed.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, the one relevant comment made is that the Liberals did vote against all of those things that were actually beneficial.

We passed a budget that required us to open up many pieces of legislation because it was a comprehensive budget. We all knew that when we were debating it.

It has been suggested that there was not ample time to discuss it. The opposition seemed to be so focused on process, as it was during the budget debates, that it actually forgot to debate what was in the budget.

There were 214 speakers. That is a fairly comprehensive list of speakers to discuss a budget. The people I heard who were actually talking about the substance of the budget, what it was going to accomplish and how it was going to help the economy, were on this side of the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of State for Finance knows, I am a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. I have a keen interest in finance.

In committee, we did indeed study Bill C-38, passed by the House, which changed, created, amended or eliminated nearly 70 pieces of legislation. The bill was so big that the committee had just one minute to discuss the interoperability of the RCMP with the FBI in Canadian territorial waters.

We then proceeded to study the privatization of seed inspections, and that of fish habitat.

We were not really able to do our job. The government knows full well that the interoperability of the Canadian and American police forces should be studied by the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, that fish habitat should be studied by the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, and so on. We, as members of the Standing Committee on Finance, were asked to study these issues.

The government often talks about the unbelievable amount of time we had to debate all this, but let us not forget that we were changing, amending or eliminating 70 laws. Roughly 280 hours were devoted to this bill, which is roughly 4 hours of debate only for each amended law. Four hours is the equivalent of two committee meetings.

Business of Supply

I would like the Minister of State for Finance to say a few words about the fact that it made no sense for the Standing Committee on Finance to study such disparate topics and the fact that we did not have enough time to discuss each of the amended laws.

• (1250)

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I have the greatest respect for the Standing Committee on Finance in the House of Commons. It does great work. I spent a number of years on that committee myself, and all members are great contributors to that. We have a wonderful chair, too. The member for Edmonton—Leduc has done a great job of shepherding that committee.

I would suggest that there are some inaccuracies being suggested. There were 145 presentations to that committee and the subcommittee of the finance committee.

Not only that, but members of Parliament have a responsibility to consult with their constituents. We always encourage that. We encourage every member to speak to their constituents when we are at the beginning of a budget process. We are at the beginning of a budget process coming up to the 2013 budget now, and we are encouraging all members to consult with their constituents and bring back those ideas.

There were 145 witnesses who physically appeared, but each member of Parliament has the responsibility to bring back the thoughts and ideas from their own constituents and contribute to this debate. That is when they bring that to the floor of the House, rather than someone reading from their BlackBerry, like the member for Burnaby—New Westminster did for hours and hours.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the debate intently. I wonder if the minister could comment, in particular, about all the notice that the Liberal Party and the NDP had regarding the contents of the budget.

Of course, I am referring specifically to the Conservative policy and platforms that we put forward for the last 10 or 12 years that contained almost all, if not all, of the provisions contained within the budget.

Indeed, they have seen that. They could visit our website to see exactly what we stand for because, at least on this side of the House, when we put forward laws, we actually put that forward to our committee members, have them vote on it and then put forward policy.

I wonder if the minister could comment specifically on that. I am a member of the finance committee and I cannot imagine sitting for any more time in any committee than we did in the last budget, in particular, the time we spent listening to witnesses.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I should take a moment to thank the finance committee members for the long hours that they did indeed spend, making sure that everyone who wanted to appear before them had the opportunity to bring forward their ideas and their thoughts.

If I do recall, we went through a rigorous process. There were many hours in this House debating. I cannot help but keep going back to the comment that it was very factual, and if anyone wants to

read *Hansard*, they would find out that the opposition simply protested because it did not like the process.

This honoured House is about debating substance, not process. We came here to pass legislation that will help the economy grow and help my constituents by making sure they have jobs and a future, not to talk about process.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, briefly to my friend from Fort McMurray—Athabasca, he could search as long as he wants in any previous Conservative document, he will find no reference to bringing U.S. law enforcement agents on to Canadian soil to arrest Canadians. That was a surprise in Bill C-38. He would find no reference to the idea that we would kill the national round table.

My question to the hon. minister is this. If he wants to pass comprehensive legislation, I get it. The government has a majority. It can pass anything it wants, but why is there this persistent refusal to allow legislation to go on its own two feet before the appropriate committee?

• (1255)

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we did. There was ample opportunity to discuss it in the House. There was obviously ample opportunity to discuss it at committee. There was lots of opportunity to talk about something other than just the process.

Comprehensive legislation is required in difficult times. I would suggest that we are not out of difficult times. We are facing the challenges of indecision outside our borders. We have to react to that. It requires comprehensive changes. It requires a comprehensive plan, and that is what we have put forward.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mount Royal.

The government has repeatedly abused Parliament by ramming through outrageous omnibus bills. For example, two years ago the government introduced an 880-page omnibus bill, a grab-bag of bills that the government wanted to pass quickly. In fact, it was half of the entire workload of Parliament from the previous year. As a result, the government was severely condemned for turning the legislative process into a farce.

Most recently, the government introduced Bill C-38, the 400-plus page omnibus budget implementation bill. Through the bill, the government sprung sweeping changes on our country, affecting everything from employment insurance, environmental protection, immigration and old age security to even the oversight that charities receive. None of these changes were in the Conservative platform. They were rushed into law by “an arrogant majority government that’s in a hurry to impose its agenda on the country”.

The government's actions reek of hypocrisy. In 1994, the right hon. member for Calgary Southwest criticized omnibus legislation, suggesting that the subject matter of such bills is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles and that dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent the views of their constituents on each part of the bill.

Business of Supply

The right hon. member is now using the very tactics he once denounced. It is a shame that he changed his tune when he was elected to the highest office in the land. Last spring's 400-page omnibus budget implementation bill contained over 60 unrelated matters, amended or abolished 74 pieces of legislation and devoted an astonishing 150 pages to destroying 50 years of environmental oversight. I quote:

This is political sleight-of-hand and message control, and it appears to be an accelerating trend. These shabby tactics keep Parliament in the dark, swamp MPs with so much legislation that they can't absorb it all, and hobble scrutiny. This is not good, accountable, transparent government.

Real democracy would have allowed for the environment sections to be separated out from the omnibus bill and sent to the environment committee for clause-by-clause scrutiny. Bill C-38 repealed the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, meaning that the assessment agency would be able to exempt a designated project from even going through the assessment process and that when environmental assessments do happen they will be narrower, less rigorous and have reduced public participation. Canada's environment commissioner says that "there will be a significant narrowing of public participation".

We have since learned that hundreds of federal environmental assessments have been dropped. Canadians should know that after a mere 16 hours of study the finance subcommittee was left with many questions regarding the legislation. What types of projects will be included or excluded under the proposed changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act? What proportion and types of current assessments will no longer receive federal oversight? How will the government define whether a provincial process is equivalent to the federal process? How will the assessment of cumulative impacts be undertaken?

During the finance subcommittee's review, Ms. Rachel Forbes, staff counsel of West Coast Environmental Law, said she did not believe the new legislation would accomplish any of the government's four pillars: more predictable and timely reviews, less duplication in reviewing projects, strong environmental protection and enhanced consultation with aboriginal peoples. In fact, she suggested the amendments may hinder them.

Bill C-38 also repealed the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, which addressed our most pressing environmental problem, namely climate change. The law required the Minister of the Environment to publish a climate change plan each year, a forecast for emissions reductions and a discussion of how the government performed the previous year and how shortcomings would be addressed. Repealing the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act will result in a loss of domestic climate accountability measures. Repealing the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy will result in the loss of a unique independent, unbiased organization, that's only fault was publishing evidence-based reports that did not agree with Conservative ideology.

● (1300)

Canadians should be deeply concerned by the repeal of the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act as the threat of climate change is serious, urgent and growing. Nine of the ten warmest years in the modern meteorological record have occurred since the year 2000. The extent and thickness of summer sea ice in the Arctic have shown

a dramatic decline over the past 30 years, with the six lowest extents having all occurred in the last six years. More disturbing still, a 2011 article in the prestigious journal *Nature* showed that the duration and magnitude of the decline may be unprecedented in the last 1,450 years.

However, this summer, the amount of ice in the Arctic shrank to an all-time low, destroying previous records. While scientists are enormously concerned that these changes represent a fundamental change and very little is known about the consequences of drastic sea ice reductions, the Minister of the Environment was perturbed mainly about how navigation patterns might be affected.

Bill C-38 also weakened several environmental laws, including protection for species at risk and water, and nearly eliminated fish habitat in the Fisheries Act, putting species from coast to coast to coast at risk.

Tom Siddon, the former Conservative minister responsible for the current Fisheries Act, was extremely concerned by the amendments and stated:

This is a covert attempt to gut the Fisheries Act, and it's appalling that they should be attempting to do this under the radar.

He also said:

They are totally watering down and emasculating the Fisheries Act...they are making a Swiss cheese out of [it].

At the finance committee, he reported:

The bottom line...take your time and do it right. To bundle all of this into a budget bill, with all its other facets, is not becoming of a Conservative government, period.

Equally astounding is the fact that Bill C-38 gave the federal cabinet the authority to overrule a decision by the National Energy Board.

The Conservatives have also cut \$29 million from Parks Canada and in doing so are undermining the health and integrity of Canada's world-renowned parks, risking some of our world heritage sites, significantly reducing the number of scientists and technical staff, hurting relationships with aboriginal peoples and attacking rural economies.

It is important to remember that when the Conservatives came to power, they inherited a legacy of balanced budgets from the previous Liberal government but soon plunged the country into a deficit before the recession ever hit. It is absolutely negligent and shameful that the government gutted environmental safeguards in order to fast-track development and balance its books.

Business of Supply

The government did not campaign in the last election on gutting environmental protection. As a result, Canadians rose up in the hope of stopping the Prime Minister's destruction of laws that protect the environment, the health and safety of Canadians, our communities, our economy and our livelihoods. The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the David Suzuki Foundation and the Pembina Institute are just some of Canada's prominent environmental organizations that called upon Canadians to speak out in defence of Canada's values of democracy and the environment.

The Black Out Speak Out campaign stated:

Our land, water and climate are all threatened by the latest federal budget. Proposed changes in the budget bill will weaken environmental laws and silence the voices of those who seek to defend them.

Silence is not an option.

We simply cannot afford economic development with reduced environmental consideration. We risk environmental disaster and cleanup costs, which we may pass on to our children. We must remember that we do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.

Canadians are entitled to expect much more than what they are witnessing today both in the protection of our environment and the protection of our democratic values, which our beautiful country was built on.

● (1305)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague about some of the substance that this House never had a chance to debate or discuss. What are her thoughts on what the minister opposite said, "More yet to come"?

In the budget implementation bill, despite the advice of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the OECD and the old age security actuarial, Mr. Bernard Dussault, that OAS was absolutely sustainable and that there was no reason to raise the age of eligibility for retirement to age 67, the government proceeded to do just that.

We did a little work and looked at what that would mean to our population. We discovered that it would increase poverty among seniors by 28%. It would increase poverty among senior women by 38% and plunge 95,000 more seniors in this country into poverty. That is what the government was planning.

Does my hon. colleague think that this next omnibus budget bill will be even worse?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there was no reason to raise the age for old age security. The Parliamentary Budget Officer and the government's own commissioned paper showed that there was no crisis. This is trying to balance the books on the backs of vulnerable Canadians.

I was born and raised in the riding that I am so honoured to represent. This is the fifth most diverse riding in the country where 70% of the people are first generation Canadians. People are calling our office and coming in to sign petitions. They are devastated by the changes to old age security. I have grandparents coming in asking me why the government is doing this to their children.

I would also raise the point that this is not the first time the government has attacked the environment through an omnibus bill. We certainly saw this in 2010 with Bill C-9.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two short quotes from 1994 by Speakers of the House at that time.

Speaker Milliken in 1994 stated:

While the subject matter may be diverse, I suggest to the hon. member that given the fact they were all introduced in the budget, they form a whole, unified policy thrust which the government has put forward and which it will be defending in the course of the debate on this bill. Therefore in my submission, the bill is entirely in order.

Speaker Parent stated:

In conclusion, it is procedurally correct and common practice for a bill to amend, repeal or enact several statutes. There are numerous rulings in which Speakers have declined to intervene simply because a bill was complex and permitted omnibus legislation to proceed.

I would ask the member if she believes that those Speakers' ruling in 1994 when the Liberals were in government were in fact in error.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will point out the following facts. The average length of a budget implementation act under the previous Liberal government was under 75 pages. The present government is currently averaging over 300 pages.

While the Prime Minister complained about five measures in the 1994 budget bill, last spring's bill contained roughly 60 distinct and unrelated measures.

As Speaker Lamoureux said in the 1970s, "...there may come a point where the omnibus bill becomes too large and too complex". We have now reached that point.

● (1310)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in this debate on omnibus legislation. Like my colleagues, and particularly now my colleague from Etobicoke North, I agree with what the current Prime Minister stated in this place in 1994 when, as an opposition member, he criticized the use of omnibus legislation asking:

How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

He continued:

We can agree with some of the measures but oppose others. How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse?

The complaint of the Prime Minister, then speaking as an opposition member in 1994, about the use of omnibus bills ought now to underpin his work as Prime Minister. Rather, he is forcing legislation through this place as he himself regaled against. Indeed, it is time that the House took action to study and restrict the use of sweeping omnibus legislation that, among other things, deprives MPs of the opportunity to undertake the requisite detailed and differentiated analysis of the diverse constituent elements in a given omnibus bill, deprives the members of the House of the necessary public oversight with respect to these bills and undermines public participation in the political process as well as the public right to know.

Business of Supply

I am not suggesting that the government somehow does not have a right to pursue its policy objectives. What must be debated, however, is the integrity of the process used and the merits of the means chosen. The purpose of Parliament is not to serve as a rubber stamp of the government, to be disconnected from the people and our constituents, even in a majority Parliament. Indeed, the government has yet to explain how Canadians are worse off when this body does take the necessary time to study subject matter items in detail, to separate out disparate legislative proposals and thereby, as a result, to produce the appropriate high-quality legislation deserving of our Parliament and our people. Indeed, it would seem by his own acknowledgement in this place that the member for Calgary Southwest at the time acknowledged these same views in 1994.

Accordingly, my brief remarks will be organized around the discussion of two particular pieces of legislation, the recent federal budget implementation bill, and Bill C-10, the omnibus crime bill. While those are the two latest and most blatant examples of the use and abuse of the omnibus process, the government has a pattern of bundling perfectly acceptable items with utterly untenable legislation, and does so not only to its peril but to the peril of its own case and cause.

The recent federal budget legislation, Bill C-38, is what I have referred to elsewhere as the hydra-headed Trojan Horse omnibus budget implementation bill, for it was as stealth-like in its scope as it will be and has been prejudicial in its impact, the whole constituting an assault on the integrity of Parliament and its members, as well as on the democratic process. That is putting it modestly and mildly.

Simply put, while this 400-plus page piece of legislation was supposed to be anchored in the budget, in reality it had very little to do with the budget. Rather, in its sweeping scope it introduced, amended or repealed more than 70 federal statutes with the omnibus Trojan Horse providing political cover for pervasive and prejudicial impacts on everything from Canadian retirement plans to environmental protection, from immigration to food safety. All of this was accomplished through sleight-of-hand omnibus legislation where, for example, one provision undermined the whole of our environmental protection safeguards.

This enormous hodgepodge, this disconnected bundling together of variegated legislative proposals, did not and does not allow for the requisite differentiated discussion and debate, let alone the necessary oversight of the legislation. It imbued the executive with arbitrary authority to the exclusion of Parliament thereby serving as a standing abuse to the canons of good governance, transparency, accountability, public oversight, cost disclosure and the like. Indeed, this alone should have been cause for its defeat.

As Andrew Coyne put it at the time, “The scale and scope is on a level not previously seen, or tolerated”. He noted that the bill made “a mockery of the confidence convention” and that there was no “common thread” or “overarching principle” between the legislative items therein, let alone its standing contempt for Parliament in matters of process and procedure.

• (1315)

Moreover, and again on the crucial issues of parliamentary process and procedure, this bill was sent to the finance committee. Accordingly, the review of the environmental regulations therein,

which overhauled, weakened and undermined the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and environmental protection as a whole, were thus not reviewed by the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development where it belonged.

Similarly, the provisions that changed the First Nations Land Management Act were not the subject of examination and study by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, as my colleague from Etobicoke North identified, where they ought to have been deliberated. I could go on with numerous examples in this regard.

Moreover, if circumventing proper and thorough parliamentary review were not enough, the government invoked time allocation to limit discussion on the bill at every stage of the legislative process.

I am not suggesting that invoking time allocation, as the government has done again and again, violates the rules of this place. What I am suggesting, as many commentators have said, is that this use of it, particularly in the context of omnibus legislation, is unnecessary, prejudicial, surprisingly undemocratic, in effect, unparliamentary, and otherwise unsubstantiated, unwarranted and, frankly, is a contempt of Parliament and the people.

Surely if Parliament had to debate something like going to war, it would be easy to see why we might have time allocation to ensure that we get to the most pressing debate first. Or, if there were court decisions that affected many statutes, we might easily welcome an omnibus bill that could make the same change to many statutes at once, and that has been done by this House.

What is so disconcerting with the budget implementation bill is that the government need not have been in such a rush. There was no coherent or compelling theme, as commentators and experts have pointed out, to the omnibus proposals contained in the bill. Frankly, it could have used more study and, as we see with the current tainted beef scandal, the provisions on food inspectors perhaps warranted a more thorough review.

There are many issues that remain with the budget implement bill, not the least of which is the question of cost disclosure and the remaining possibility of a lawsuit from the PBO over the government's failure to be open and transparent about the extent of the budget cuts proposed and its cost impact.

In the matter of the omnibus crime legislation, Bill C-10, the problem with omnibus legislation is illustrated no less compellingly. While the same generic omnibus critiques operate in this context, namely, what Richard Poplak in a *Globe and Mail* piece termed “Chinese disease...hollowing out democracy”, for which Canadians are increasingly bearing the burden of this onslaught, I would refer to one case study of the government's omnibus failure: the amendments to the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act, JvTA.

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The JVTA was one of nine constituent bills of Bill C-10, one which received little attention. This landmark legislation, however, allowed, for the first time, Canadian victims of terror to sue their terrorist perpetrators in Canadian courts.

I supported the principles of the JVTA and had even introduced similar legislation in a previous session for that purpose. However, the government's version of this bill warranted improvement, which it did not allow for. Accordingly, I proposed a series of amendments at the legislative committee, explaining that I sought only to strengthen the government's bill. All of my amendments were summarily rejected by the Conservatives, as were all opposition amendments. Indeed, all 50 of my proposed amendments to Bill C-10 were summarily rejected. There was no debate or consideration given. In fact, I was accused of obstruction and delay for merely suggesting these changes. At the next meeting, the government moved to shut down debate entirely, a flagrant abuse of the parliamentary and legislative process.

Certainly a majority government has the procedural right to use its majority as it pleases. However, it ignores the opposition at its peril. Indeed, the government eventually realized the merit of my amendments and proposed them later as its own. Therefore, these amendments became part of the legislation in a dilatory fashion, prejudicing the outcome and even the improvement that could have been warranted in that legislation.

Simply put, legislation has to be examined on the merits and, when so examined, the Conservatives' omnibus crime bill revealed that it would result in more crime, less justice, at greater cost, with fewer rehabilitation opportunities for offenders, less protection and voice for the victims, and less protection for society. We are now slowly seeing the consequences of the legislation being that which we predicted at the time. In fact, we have situations and problems with regard with prison overcrowding, mandatory minimum penalties and the like, that are likely to be struck down by the courts. I could go on.

• (1320)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some of the contributions today from the opposite side have brought to mind a comment that at the time shocked me. Back in May when the Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity Act, omnibus Bill C-38, was being debated, the Conservative member for Vegreville—Wainwright said:

Mr. Speaker, the member must really have very little to complain about when it comes to this legislation, because he focuses on the process, as do so many others opposite.

Quite frankly, Canadians do not care about process; what they care about is what the end result will be. What they care about is having ample time for debate, and there has been a record amount of time for debate on a budget bill.

Does my colleague think this might be indicative of a broader attitude that underlies how the Conservative government thinks of democracy in the House? I wonder if the hon. member for Mount Royal might comment on whether this reveals an underlying problem with how the government thinks about the House.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, when the Prime Minister was a member of the opposition, he addressed the question of process in particular and expressed his concern that omnibus-type legislating was undermining the parliamentary process. As I said,

this has been undermining the integrity of Parliament itself because process is inextricably bound up with parliamentary procedure, inextricably bound up with our constitutional responsibilities for public oversight, for seeking cost disclosure and the like.

When legislation is bundled together and rushed through Parliament, it has adverse consequences on both process and substance. The legislation itself may be flawed but may never get properly examined. The committee process that is used does not allow for adequate review and the calling of appropriate witnesses, particularly when we have time allocation. The use of such time allocation may compound matters to exclude stakeholders, not only us here in this Parliament but even in a federation it may exclude provinces' input, as we saw with Bill C-10 and the omnibus crime bill.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each time my colleague delivers a speech in the House people usually take note, and today is no exception. He has nailed a couple of very important points, the reflection on and the comparison with what took place with Bill C-10. The member proposed amendments that were voted down by the Conservative majority in committee. The minister tried to put them back into the legislation at the last minute, which did not happen, but at least the amendments did get in through the Senate. Those improvements, because it was at odds with the charter, made sense.

Eight hundred amendments were proposed to the omnibus bill through debate here in the House and through votes in the House, and the government supported none of them. Was the member somewhat surprised that there was not one suggestion or amendment brought forward that might have been able to improve the omnibus bill? Was he surprised that the government rejected all 800 amendments?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, normally one should be surprised; in fact one should even be shocked by such an approach. However I have come to learn that such has become a matter that is passed off as normal process and procedure in the House, which really is an abuse of process and procedure. It goes much further.

We are witnessing situations because of the manner in which we are enacting legislation with constitutionally suspect provisions. I am not only referring here to those mandatory minimums, which have already been ruled unconstitutional in the Smickle case in Ontario, but to other provisions with regard to prison overcrowding, where we are going to witness constitutional challenges as well.

There is a whole series of constitutionally suspect legislation where we could be avoiding unnecessary litigation. We are going to be imbuing the public with unnecessary costs, and the legislative process will be unnecessarily burdened.

Let me just quote and conclude with what the Prime Minister himself said, because this is a perfect conclusion to this debate. The Prime Minister argued in 1994 that his concern with omnibus legislation was "in the interests of democracy". Surely it is in the interests of democracy that this matter now be properly studied and remedied by this place.

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• (1325)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate this opportunity to address my hon. colleague's motion. However, from the outset, I want to point out to my colleagues across the way that the economy remains priority one for our Conservative government.

With the economic recovery still fragile, we remain focused on ensuring Canada offers the right environment to attract the best business investment necessary to create more and better-paying jobs and improve the living standard of Canadians. Ironically, one of the most effective ways to achieve this is through action opposed by the other side, to give job creators means to hire more workers by lowering their taxes, which is exactly what this government has done. Rest assured that our Conservative government understands that it is lower taxes that help stimulate job growth and that it is expanding markets for Canadian businesses that will help our economy thrive.

The fact is that we have a strong economic record, one that Canadians can look to and trust, as we once again face the economic headwinds emanating from abroad. In short, thanks to the prudent fiscal and economic decisions made before the downturn hit, Canada's economic and fiscal health today is stronger than that of most other developed nations.

When faced with the unprecedented global crisis, our government responded with Canada's economic action plan, which stimulated the economy, protected Canadian jobs during the recession and invested in long-term growth. The results have been both positively received and widely recognized. For example, the Canadian economy's performance on jobs and economic growth has been among the best in the G7. While we would like to see more progress, it is important to note that we have recovered and exceeded all of the output and all of the jobs lost during the recession.

Since July 2009, more than 820,000 net new jobs have been created, the strongest growth in the G7 by far. Certainly in my riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, we have seen a dramatic drop in the unemployment rate in our particular community. Virtually all of those jobs have been full-time positions. However, that is not all. Canada has the distinction of having the world's soundest banking system for the fifth year in a row, as affirmed two weeks ago by the World Economic Forum. *Forbes* magazine has ranked Canada number one in its annual review of the best countries for business.

Five Canadian financial institutes were named to Bloomberg's list of the world's strongest banks, more than any other country. Three credit rating agencies, Moody's, Fitch and Standard & Poor's, have all recently reaffirmed Canada's top-tier, AAA credit rating. What is more, our \$3 billion U.S. bond issue earlier this year was widely subscribed, with *EuroWeek* magazine concluding that the fact that Canada is

able to do a trade like that...cements its status as a true Treasury alternative and the best credit in the world.

Clearly, Canada's fiscal fundamentals are solid, and people are noticing. In fact, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has praised Canada's economic record, saying:

Canada's path of great budgetary discipline and a very heavy emphasis on growth and overcoming the crisis, not living on borrowed money, can be an example for the

way in which problems on the other side of the Atlantic can be addressed.... This is also the right solution for Europe.

While Canada's economic achievements are encouraging, our government understands that now is not the time to become complacent. There are international risks that can affect our outlook: the crisis in Europe and the slowing recovery in the U.S.

I would like to draw everyone's attention to the enduring sovereign and banking crisis in Europe. As the Prime Minister has observed, "The risks to the global economy stemming from the euro zone remain considerably elevated, with the capacity to affect all of us".

In the eurozone, real GDP contracted in the fourth quarter of 2011, was virtually flat in the first quarter of 2012 and then contracted again in the second quarter of 2012. In addition, current indicators show little improvement, suggesting that the euro area economy is unlikely to see a sharp rebound in the near future.

Many nations, even those oceans away, are concerned about the impact of the eurozone crisis on their own economies. We are all obviously concerned about the situation there, but European leaders need to address their economic problems directly.

• (1330)

The recent announcement by the European Central Bank that it would support European sovereign bond markets is a step in the right direction. However, as the Minister of Finance has noted, we continue to wait for intentions to become actions.

Another serious issue of concern for the world economy is the long-term fiscal challenges of the U.S. This also has a short-term dynamic. Without a political agreement, a number of tax increases and spending reduction measures, representing about 4% of U.S. GDP, are scheduled to come into force at the beginning of 2013. This has been labelled the "fiscal cliff". The U.S. needs to reduce its fiscal deficit over time. This point is clear. However, it also needs to ensure that there is certainty in the short term, so that markets and investors can be confident that its economic growth will not be interrupted.

Interestingly enough, it is Americans who are suggesting that the United States should emulate Canada's policies to improve their own economic situation. Indeed, just last year the finance committee travelled to the U.S. and met with congressmen and senators. At every meeting we went into, there was so much appreciation and people said we were so lucky to come from Canada.

Just a month ago, we received the highest praise from our American friends when Tom Donohue, President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said:

We've got a strong example of the positive effect of good policies...—Canada. Why has our northern neighbor recovered faster and more robustly from the global recession than nearly all the other major economies? Due to a series of smart policy decisions.

Business of Supply

... Canada has transformed its economy while other nations continue to struggle.
...it is growing faster than many of its competitors. It has recovered all the jobs lost in the recession...

Let's take a lesson from the north and tackle these priorities now.

What a great quote from our American friends.

It is our Conservative government that understands what type of economic policies Canada will need to weather the storms beyond our borders. What better place to find examples of policies that create jobs, stimulate economic growth and secure Canada's long-term prosperity than economic action plan 2012?

With our largest historical trading partners, the United States and Europe, going through a prolonged period of economic uncertainty, we know this will put downward pressure on Canada's economic growth. We will not be able to rely on these trading partners to the same extent we did in the past. We must develop new markets and create new opportunities in dynamic parts of the world if we are going to keep raising our standard of living.

Our government is committed to increasing Canada's exports and creating conditions necessary for our homegrown businesses to compete in the global marketplace. Increasing Canadian export is key to our future growth. Our government believes that the sustainable growth agenda involves structural reforms, including trade liberalization that allows for Canadian businesses and their workers to fully compete in the global market.

Our government has already made Canada one of the most open and globally engaged economies in the world. In six years we have reached trade agreements with nine countries and are negotiating with many more. We have also concluded foreign investment promotion and protection agreements with 11 countries and are in active negotiations with 14 others. We are optimistic that our negotiations with the European Union will soon produce an ambitious trade agreement that facilitates increased Canadian exports to Europe. Recently, our Prime Minister met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Ottawa to strengthen dialogue on this key initiative.

However, it does not end there. Combined with the government's commitment to increasing Canadian exports is our continued tariff relief to enhance the competitiveness of Canada's manufacturers and importers. In all, our government has eliminated more than 1,800 tariff items and provided more than \$435 million in annual tariff relief to Canadian businesses. As a result, Canada is now the first tariff-free manufacturing zone in the G20.

Our government continues to create the right conditions to enable Canadians and Canadian businesses to feel confident to invest, to create jobs, to participate in the global marketplace and to grow our economy.

• (1335)

In fact, just last week the Minister of Finance announced new tariff relief for Canadian manufacturers to help create jobs and economic growth and enhance their competitiveness in the domestic and international markets.

Let me stress this point. Trade has long been a powerful engine for Canada's economy, driving it forward through some pretty tough

times. It demonstrates the government firmly believes and our record demonstrates that.

Unfortunately, not all the parties represented in the House share that view. If the NDP had its way, we know that our economy would falter under its protectionist policies. That party has opposed almost every trade agreement that has come before the House. The Liberal Party just let the trade file languish during its time in government. Fortunately, on this side of the House, we take action.

Deepening Canada's trade investment relationships in large and fast-growing export markets around the world is integral to jobs and growth. In the past few years, our government has been aggressively expanding commercial relationships in the Asia-Pacific region to create jobs and economic benefit. The opportunities for Canada in this dynamic region are vast, with an economic growth rate that is two to three times the global average.

By 2040, China and India are predicted to be the number two and number four destinations for Canada's merchandise exports, with South Korea and Japan in the top ten as well. That is why we are pursuing a whole host of trade initiatives with Asia.

Let us consider the Trans-Pacific Partnership, for example. The TPP's current membership represents a market of 510 million people and a GDP of \$17.6 trillion.

At the G20 leaders summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, TPP partners announced their support for Canada joining this partnership and, indeed, it was an historic opportunity.

However, this trade effort in this region has some company. In addition to the TPP, Canada is pursuing a number of similar initiatives, including continuing trade negotiations with Japan and continuing exploratory discussions toward trade negotiations with Thailand.

Our government continues to take action to increase Canadian exports to China. China is the second largest two-way trading partner, after the United States, and bilateral trade is expanding rapidly. Fuelled by a 27% boost in Canadian exports to China, two-way merchandise trade reached \$65 billion in 2011, accounting for 7.3% of Canada's trade.

Again, on a local note, I look at our forestry industry in British Columbia. That expansion into China in terms of its product has been absolutely critical in terms of its continuation.

More specific, from 2006 to 2011, Canadian exports to China rose from \$7.8 billion to \$16.8 billion, an increase of 115%. During the same period, Canadian imports from China rose from \$34.5 billion to \$48.2 billion, an increase of 40%.

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Canada has a strong network of trade commissioners throughout China who can help Canadian businesses to assess the potential of the Chinese market, find qualified contacts and resolve any problems that might come along the way. This network was expanded in 2009, when Canada opened six regional trade offices to expand our presence to second-tier cities, the new drivers of the Chinese economic growth. Our country now has 11 points of contact for Canadian businesses in China.

To increase protection for Canadian business in China, earlier this month, we signed the Canada-China foreign investment promotion and protection agreement. This landmark agreement will provide a more stable and secure environment for Canadian businesses in China.

I could easily go on for another 20 minutes, highlighting our government's economic action plan initiatives to strengthen business competitiveness, for example, in resource development, immigration reform, cutting red tape. It is pretty clear that when it comes to creating the kinds of economic growth that will mean a brighter future for Canadians and their families, this side of the House knows the best route to getting there. Why? Because, unlike the Liberals, our government has a plan for jobs and growth and will continue to stick with it.

I urge my colleagues across the floor to stop voting against a plan that would create jobs, generate economic growth and secure Canada's long-term prosperity. Our Conservative government is creating the right conditions for Canadian businesses to compete around the world. Our government is absolutely committed to keeping Canada strong and prosperous, even in a volatile and uncertain economy. Maybe for a change the Liberals will get on board.

• (1340)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the Conservative member, and she was very careful not to mention the motion. I will quote for her the key point of the motion. It is the Prime Minister's words. In 1994 he said:

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.... Second, in the interest of democracy I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

Those were the Prime Minister's words then. I could not tell from the Conservative member's remarks if the member was advising that the Prime Minister's words were wrong then, or has he broken the words he used then in recent years and now is pushing an omnibus bill that goes against the very words he said in 1994?

What advice is the member giving us in terms of the Prime Minister's word? Is she advising that the Prime Minister stand and oppose omnibus bills today, or break his word from 1994?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I spent a great deal of time in my remarks talking about the very extraordinary situation we found ourselves in as a government, a situation that required a comprehensive response in a whole host of areas and that would knit together to provide the future and the path toward our future.

Prior to the budget implementation act one, there was a technical briefing that was very poorly attended by MPs on the other side of

the House. During the technical briefing, there was an opportunity to hear, in great detail, how these different measures knitted together in a comprehensive whole to move Canada forward for our economic prosperity.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remind my colleague opposite that we are not debating the content of any particular bill. She is constantly bringing up the omnibus budget implementation bill and defending what was in it.

Essentially I am concerned about what comprehensive legislation does and how it affects what we look at within those bills, not what we have done within the bills, but how we look at those different issues in the bill.

There are basically two different ways we could put forward legislation. There is the omnibus idea, where a lot of stuff is packed into one thing. Yes, it allows the government to push through its agenda very quickly, but is this quick legislation more important than ensuring that we have a meaningful examination of what is being done and allowing members to express themselves on different issues and how they would affect our constituencies.

Would the member opposite comment on that?

• (1345)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, that question is about process. I talked about the extraordinary and very important situation in which Canada found itself. However, I do want to spend a minute talking about the process.

The bill had incredible opportunities within the House for debate. I sit as a member of the finance committee. I certainly recognize the hours and hours of listening to witnesses. I talked earlier about a technical briefing which unfortunately was somewhat poorly attended by the opposition, but was an enormous opportunity to really understand what the bill was trying to accomplish.

We certainly had significant debate. I note there were areas that were divided into a subcommittee, which also spent a lot of time looking at specific areas in environment and fisheries. If I look at the opportunity for the members of Parliament to debate the legislation, the time spent in committee and in subcommittee was a good opportunity to look at the measures in the bill and the opportunities it provided.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was a bit surprised by this motion. Previous governments, including the Liberal government, have passed omnibus budget implementation bills. Even Speakers in the House have ruled and some have said that these types of bills are procedurally correct, common practice and entirely in order. I listen to the arguments of the members opposite and one of their concerns is that our bill is bigger than their bill.

First, I did not know that size matters. Second, when we talk about what is inside our bill and how comprehensive it is, I wonder if it ever has dawned on those members that perhaps it is comprehensive because the government is actually getting things done for Canadians.

Business of Supply

Could my hon. colleague speak to the importance of the bill being comprehensive at this time, especially with global uncertainty?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, my colleague brings up two very important points. One is that the Speaker's rulings in 1994 looked at the budgets and budget implementation acts as typically involving a lot of statutes and helping to move the policy agenda forward.

Earlier in my speech, I talked about the very extraordinary circumstances that we found ourselves in with global uncertainty. Since the depression, we have not found ourselves in such a difficult financial situation. Therefore, having a comprehensive plan that is far reaching and has guided Canada into a very enviable position has been absolutely critical.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have restrained myself from asking the hon. member to keep her points relevant to today's motion, so forgive me for also asking an irrelevant question based on something in her speech.

She has been touting the benefits of the Canada-China increasing investments. What is the member's opinion on whether it would not be prudent for the current Canada-China investment treaty, which would lock Canada in for a period of 15 years to preferential treatment of Chinese enterprises, even more preferential treatment than Canadian businesses would receive in China, to come before the House of Commons before it passes automatically in Privy Council?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, that truly is not only inaccurate but it is outside the relevance of the discussion for today. However, I look at the forestry sector in British Columbia, and the member is also from the community of British Columbia, and how trade with China has been absolutely critical. I have a number of mills in my community that have put a couple of hundred people in our rural areas back to work. Again, that relates to our very positive trade relationships throughout the world.

Again, it does all tie into a big budget bill requiring a comprehensive plan for extraordinary times.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to wonder when I hear the member opposite talk about the government's fabulous track record. Canada has a trade deficit of \$50 billion. If she follows her plan, how much further in debt will we be in four or five years? \$150 billion? \$200 billion? I have my doubts about this plan.

There is one thing that the Conservatives do not seem to consider. By winning a majority, they won the right to do whatever they want. I get the impression that, by abusing procedure, they are trying to give themselves the right to do whatever they want any way they want. Parliamentary procedures and traditions exist so that things are done a certain way. By trying to quickly pass such massive bills, the Conservatives are showing their contempt for other members of Parliament.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, if we reflect back on the Speaker's rulings of the past and we reflect on the need for a budget

to reflect very comprehensive challenges that a country faces, he will see that we have followed what is a very good process and indeed the outcomes have been extraordinary. We look at 820,000 net new jobs, some of the best growth in the G7. Again, the outcomes speak for themselves.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed it is a good day to be debating this particular subject for several reasons. I will be splitting my time with the member for Kingston and the Islands.

The previous speaker talked about comprehensiveness as a defence of the omnibus legislation. However, something can be as comprehensive as one wishes, but if it is dumb, it is dumb. Whether it is layered with other material, it does not matter, it still comes out in the end as I said.

What we are talking about today in regard to omnibus legislation really runs roughshod over what we are trying to do in the House. We are trying to have a comprehensive debate and to get answers to questions that we have on particular situations, whether they deal with the environment or fiscal matters and taxation.

Lately, it has been hard in this House to have a debate in which members are not totally into their notes. We look at the speaking handed to us by people who are not elected. No offence to them, but do we not gather enough information when we go about in our ridings that we cannot stand up and say to this House and the country what it is that we are representing? Can we not come into this House, stand here and speak freely about what is happening in our ridings and how we are affected by budget legislation?

Come with me to a time in 2004 when we had the Atlantic accord. It was decent legislation that talked about the sharing of resources between Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador as well as Nova Scotia. We had serious negotiations about how to share revenues.

For example, I have always felt that the principal beneficiary of any particular resource should be those closest to that resource. The lion's share of the royalties of the oil extracted from the oil sands goes to the crown in Alberta. However, in this case, because the resources are offshore, they are in the jurisdiction of the federal government and so something had to be done.

Why can Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and Nova Scotians not be principal beneficiaries of what is on their shoreline? It is what they fished for over centuries. If there is oil beneath those fish, obviously they should reap the benefits of that as well and be responsible for it.

We were engaged in a large argument but an agreement was reached between the then premiers, Danny Williams and John Hamm, as well as the prime minister of the day, the Right Hon. Paul Martin. The deal had to be put into legislation and it was put into a budget bill. There we have the message.

At the time, the Conservatives, including the now Prime Minister, the ministers from Newfoundland and Labrador and from Nova Scotia as well as the critics all said vehemently, "How dare you do that? How dare you take something as special as this and lump it into a larger budget legislation?"

Statements by Members

Now, several years forward, all of a sudden we not only find ourselves getting special legislation like the Atlantic accord but also that other things are being added to the budget bill to a point where everything that was said before is now denied. It is now said to be different, that it is different in scope, to the effect that “We have the keys to the shop now; therefore, the shop has to change in our direction”.

I hope the message that we give to the Conservatives today will simply be this: When will they practice what they used to preach?

Let us take a look at 2006. Just before taking the reins of power, the Conservatives said that in order to benefit Newfoundland and Labrador so that it would be the principal beneficiary of its own resources, they would take the line that stretches 200 nautical miles from the shoreline and the federal government would own the species in that zone and manage and be responsible for them. Anything beyond that line would international and they would go through international forums to resolve issues. However, the Conservatives said that they would remove that line and unilaterally move it out a further 200 miles. What did they do?

• (1355)

As my hon. colleague from Avalon would say: “Nothing, not a thing”. We got nothing out of it.

This is the situation. The Conservatives went to the international forum and said they had a deal that actually gave them custodial management. Can members imagine that? They were actually going to move this line. Not only did they break the promise, not only did they backtrack, but they also pretended they did not. That has to be the worst of all. Not only would they lead us down the garden path and tell us something that they would not do, they thought we were stupid enough to buy it. They actually thought that we believed they had done it. It is like a political Cirque du Soleil. There are so many jumps and theatrics involved it is not even funny. They were going to move it unilaterally from the shoreline out further. Nada. Nothing.

To move on to this particular omnibus bill and look at what they did, say that everything we have ever wanted to do for this country were to be wrapped into one little pill we could swallow. None of it was debated. Given the fact that most of the members refer to talking points, we can understand where they are coming from with omnibus legislation, because every word is the same. Everything that is wrong with the other side of the House is wrapped up in talking points pertaining to something that we are not even going to do and never said we would do. How many times do they get up and read exactly what the other person has said?

There is a theory out there that if one can convince a hundred monkeys to do the same thing, the rest of society will think those monkeys are right. There we have the perfect analogy: If one says something hard enough, long enough, people just might believe it. The problem is that the Conservatives actually think that others will believe the same thing. To say it is laughable is the biggest understatement of the day. When do they practice what they used to preach? That is the issue here. Again, we used the quotation in the motion.

Bear with me on this one. This is my favourite. On March 25, 1994, the Prime Minister criticized omnibus legislation, suggesting

that the subject matter of those bills was so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles. Congratulations to the Conservative Party of Canada. It has now run completely against its own principle on this one, yet it pretends it has not. When will it practice what it used to preach? That is the ultimate goal.

I would humbly say to the House when it comes to the legislation, what is wrong with taking this apart? The experts, the people who study legislation, have said that it should be taken apart to be looked at separately, and in particular that the environmental legislation in this omnibus bill is worthy of its own debate and having its own committee. When the Conservative government was first elected, it created a subcommittee on the environment alone. Now all of a sudden the environment is lumped into everything else that is on the go.

Here is a good one. The Conservatives are going to look at MPs' pensions. They should look at MPs' pensions. Now they will also look at perhaps unfreezing our salaries. So much for the pain. Freeze the salaries. That is right, freeze the salaries and take a look at our contributing more. If they were gutsy enough they would take this out of the bill and say they were freezing our salaries and looking at our pensions and that we would suffer as a result, just like every other Canadian is now. However, the backbenchers do not want to do that.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The time for government orders has expired. Therefore, the five minutes of questions and answers will take place after question period.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Ahuntsic.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I introduced a bill to provide better tools to police forces and prosecutors in the fight against human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The bill calls for the proceeds of this crime to be confiscated, for the victims to be protected and for tougher sentences to be handed down.

This bill was drafted following extensive consultation, including with police officers from the SPVM morality branch and child sexual exploitation unit, the Barreau du Québec, and women's and victims' advocacy groups such as Afeas, the Regroupement québécois des CALACS, COCES, Concertation-Femme, Maison de Marthe, Plaidoyers-Victimes, the Centre diocésain de la condition des femmes, CATHII and the CLE.

I want to thank all these people for their dedication to the victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, and I wish to acknowledge the presence of some of these groups in the House.

Statements by Members

I invite all my colleagues to set partisanship aside and support this bill in the name of justice and dignity for all victims of human trafficking.

* * *

[English]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is National Science and Technology Week. Across the country youth are learning about future careers in science and we are showcasing Canada as a world leader in research, development and innovation.

In my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, I recently met a young CEO, Ryan Holmes, who is an Okanagan success story in innovation and technology with the social media company HootSuite, proof that in the Okanagan, as in the rest of Canada, innovation is flourishing.

A recent study by the Council of Canadian Academies came to the conclusion that Canada's science and technology enterprise is healthy, growing, internationally competitive and well respected. This success can be attributed to our government making science and technology a priority. We have provided an unprecedented \$8 billion in new funding since 2006, which has resulted in Canada being internationally praised for our ongoing commitment to supporting science.

This is good news, which I encourage my colleagues from all sides of the House to share with Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

OFFSHORE SAFETY

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a debate taking place in Newfoundland and Labrador over whether to resume helicopter night flights to offshore oil platforms on the Grand Banks.

The Wells inquiry into the March 2009 crash of Cougar Flight 491, which killed 17 workers, recommended that night flights be suspended until all risks are mitigated to an acceptable level. The offshore oil companies have just delivered a report that recommends a resumption of night flights, but that report says there is still a definite higher risk at night than during the day.

Workers on offshore oil platforms say that risk is too high. Their families say that risk is too high. The most important recommendation of the Wells inquiry was for there to be an independent safety regulator for the offshore oil industry, that an independent safety regulator, not the oil companies themselves, would be the best judge of justifiable risk.

Once again, the Conservative government is failing to protect workers at sea.

* * *

• (1405)

HEART DISEASE

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past summer, Brett Maclean, a professional hockey player from Port

Elgin, suffered cardiac arrest while playing pickup hockey with his friends in an arena in Owen Sound. Fortunately, the arena was equipped with an automatic external defibrillator, which was used to bring Brett back from the brink. Only 23 years old and coming off a 25-goal season in the American Hockey League, Brett was working toward a full-time spot in the NHL.

I would like to commend Mr. Maclean on his strength and positive outlook on life after this sudden incident. His hockey career is over for now, but his impact on the community is just beginning. In August, Brett, along with some help from his friends, put on a road hockey tournament at the Lakeshore Racquetball Club in Port Elgin, raising money for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Earlier this month, Brett also took part in the launch of the Heart and Stroke Foundation's new awareness campaign, just three months out of the hospital.

I congratulate Brett for his courage and willingness to help others battle this serious disease. We must all work together to help fight heart disease and raise awareness. Congratulations to Brett.

* * *

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a remarkable woman living in Clarenville in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

On September 4, Mrs. Lydia Hiscock turned 105 years old. Since 2009, Mrs. Hiscock has been residing at the Dr. Albert O'Mahony Memorial Manor. She was among its first residents and helped cut the ribbon when the facility held its official opening.

Born in the picturesque fishing community of Little Heart's Ease in 1907, Mrs. Hiscock married her husband, George, in 1930. Together they raised eight children and have been blessed with a large extended family. She has 33 grandchildren, 58 great-grandchildren and 27 great-great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Hiscock worked hard over the years cleaning and drying fish and carrying out other chores that were part of the daily routine of our outpost life in Newfoundland and Labrador. According to Mrs. Hiscock, hard work and a profound belief in God have been the pillars of her long life.

I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing Mrs. Hiscock who is now in her 106th year.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was in the Democratic Republic of Congo this past weekend for the summit of la Francophonie, where he emphasized the importance for all member states, including the DRC, to guarantee respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Statements by Members

Canada has voiced our concerns over the situation in the DRC, including the number of human rights violations, the need to improve democracy and the deterioration of the security situation in the east. The Prime Minister made it very clear that concrete progress in these areas must be made.

While visiting, the Prime Minister announced funding of \$20 million over four years to help developing countries manage their natural resource industries responsibly and transparently while fostering prosperity and job creation.

We will continue to express our deep concern with the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

* * *

[Translation]

PAS DE LA RUE SENIORS' ORGANIZATION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Montreal organization PAS de la rue launched a campaign to raise awareness about seniors' vulnerability. This organization was founded 15 years ago and welcomes, supports and encourages people 55 and over who are homeless or living in great poverty.

A number of factors contribute to their vulnerability: all too often they do not have enough income to meet their basic needs, there is a lack of social housing, the job market for older workers is precarious, and ageism is becoming more prevalent. The federal government has the power to address these factors.

Tomorrow, we will begin debating a bill introduced by the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot to ensure that all Canadians have safe, adequate, accessible and affordable housing. The bill presents an excellent opportunity to address one of the most urgent problems affecting homeless single seniors.

I am proud to add my voice to that of PAS de la rue, which maintains that it is time to change the discourse about homeless seniors and the place of seniors in our society.

* * *

[English]

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last couple of months we have heard a lot of rhetoric about pipelines in Canada. I think it is important to focus on a few facts.

There are 72,000 kilometres of pipeline currently in our country, and 99.996% of crude oil and petroleum was transported safely. Pipelines are an efficient and environmentally friendly method for transportation of this important resource. For example, in my constituency alone, it would take 1,400 trucks per day to transport the amount of oil that flows through our local pipeline. This pipeline supplies much of the gasoline consumed in British Columbia.

Our commitment to diversifying our markets to create jobs and opportunities for Canadians across this country is critical for our long-term prosperity.

Our Conservative government proudly supports the development of our energy sector in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. It is time to move forward to having the safest pipeline system in the world.

* * *

● (1410)

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMING CONTEST

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during national science and technology week, I would like to highlight an outstanding achievement by a resident in my riding of Richmond Hill.

Twenty-year-old Tyson Andre is a gifted computer engineering student attending the University of Waterloo. Tyson, along with teammates, Benoit Maurin and Anton Raichuk, won a bronze medal at the 2012 Association for Computing Machinery International Collegiate Programming Contest world finals in Warsaw, Poland.

This prestigious contest involves the cream of the crop of the world's top computer science and engineering students. An incredible 30,000 participants from 2,200 universities and 85 countries took part this year. To reach the finals, the Waterloo team had placed first in North America at the University of Chicago Invitational Programming Contest, defeating the likes of Harvard, Stanford and Princeton.

These are tremendous accomplishments and honours for Canada, and I invite all members to join me in congratulating Tyson, Benoit and Anton on a job very well done.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD FOOD DAY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is World Food Day, a day to increase awareness of food problems throughout the world and to strengthen solidarity in the fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

Still today, 868 million people go hungry and 19 million children suffer from severe acute malnutrition. That is a huge number. Here in Canada, close to 900,000 Canadians use a food bank every month.

In Berthier—Maskinongé, the food banks are having trouble keeping up with the increasing demand. What is worse, they are also having a hard time maintaining these services. They cannot even afford to pay for the basics, such as refrigerator trucks or a larger fridge, and they do not have enough money to pay the salaries of the core members of their team.

Let us take the time today to think about what we can do now to eliminate hunger in Canada and throughout the world.

Statements by Members

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to condemn the actions of two members of the opposition. On October 8, the members for Burnaby—New Westminster and Vancouver Kingsway co-sponsored an event in support of an infamous KGB veteran residing illegally in Canada.

Mikhail Lennikov is a captain in the Soviet Union's secret police, an organization that suppressed millions during one of history's darkest periods. He entered Canada illegally. His asylum claim was rejected by the Immigration and Refugee Board and his appeal was rejected by a Federal Court judge. Despite a deportation order, he continues to remain in Canada by living in a church basement proclaiming a right to sanctuary that simply does not exist in Canadian law.

By celebrating this KGB agent, an illegal immigrant, these two members of the opposition are making a mockery of not only the suffering of millions, including members of my own family, but of the rule of law in Canada. Why will the NDP not stand up for Canada's laws?

* * *

[Translation]

LAVAL SENIORS' WEEK 2012

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the slogan chosen by about 60 stakeholders from all types of seniors' organizations for the 23rd edition of Laval Seniors' Week is: "Take the time".

This year, a myriad of cultural and physical activities, concerts, lectures, contests and social gatherings will be held around Île Jésus from Wednesday, October 17 to Sunday, October 28.

Organizations such as Appui de Laval, Association des personnes aphasiques de Laval, Association pour aînés résidant à Laval, Centre de bénévolat et moisson Laval, DIRA-Laval, Maison des grands-parents de Laval, Place des aînés de Laval, Société Alzheimer Laval and Table régionale de concertation des aînés de Laval will all be participating.

I encourage everyone to take part in the 23rd edition of Laval Seniors' Week and let us not forget to "take the time".

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is proud to stand with Canada's great small businesses during Small Business Week.

Our small business owners employ millions of Canadians and are the backbone of Canada's economy. We are proud of these small businesses, which bring important products and services to their local communities.

One thing that would threaten to undo the success of our small business owners is the NDP leader's job-killing carbon tax. The NDP leader's job-killing \$21 billion carbon tax would increase the price of everything, including gas, groceries and hydro.

That is not the way to support entrepreneurs and that is why on this side of the House we will continue to fight it.

* * *

SYRIA

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the foreign affairs committee met this morning to discuss the alarming and horrific situation in Syria. I was reminded that the international community intervened and invoked the Responsibility to Protect doctrine to protect civilians in Libya. However, the international community has not intervened, despite the recurrent criminality in Syria, and has chosen even to ignore the R2P doctrine, let alone its obligations.

Admittedly, as witnesses testified this morning, the Friends of Syria have effectively replaced the Security Council. It should now undertake, with Canada and its leadership, a series of necessary protective measures. R2P does not necessarily mean military action. It allows us to establish humanitarian corridors to deliver necessary humanitarian relief. It allows us to establish safe zones to assist internally displaced persons. It allows us to organize the patchwork militias into a coherent democratic opposition and it allows us to protect against weapons of mass destruction, such as the chemical weapons in Syria.

Loss of time means loss of lives. The time to act is now and it is long past. Every day more Syrians die, not because of the actions we have taken but because of the actions we have not taken.

* * *

[Translation]

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Winnipeg South Centre are worried about the NDP's plan to impose a carbon tax that would kill jobs and increase the price of gas and nearly everything else. More specifically, they are worried that the NDP is refusing to admit that it plans on imposing such a tax.

Here are the facts. Page 12 of the NDP's election platform states that "[The NDP] will put a price on carbon through a cap-and-trade system". Page 3 of a policy document from the leader of the NDP states that the NDP wants to "use revenue generated by a cap and trade system".

My constituents have every reason to be concerned. Fortunately, they elected our government, which will stay focused on jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity for future generations.

*Oral Questions***MEMBER FOR LOTBINIÈRE—CHUTES-DE-LA-CHAUDIÈRE**

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the fall, the hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière has made two members' statements. Neither one was on his riding. Not one.

He could have taken the opportunity to tell us about the upcoming opening of the cogeneration plant in Saint-Patrice-de-Beaurivage, in his riding. This project is good for the environment and good for economic development.

He also could have told us how proud he is of the upcoming, first-ever Journée Entreprendre ici Lotbinière, which will contribute to the growth of the entrepreneurial culture and the economic development of Lotbinière. But no, instead he told made-up stories about the NDP at the expense of his constituents.

He had a choice. He could have acknowledged the accomplishments of his constituents and the organizations in his riding or simply read the latest talking points written by the Prime Minister's puppets. He chose to turn his back on his constituents, the people who elected him.

It will be up to him to explain to the people of his riding why they do not deserve any recognition from their member of Parliament.

* * *

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the constituents of my riding of Brampton—Springdale are worried about what the NDP carbon tax would cost them and their families.

The NDP promised a new \$21 billion carbon tax on page 4 of its election platform. My constituents know that this NDP carbon tax would raise the price of gas, groceries and even locally grown food.

The NDP leader's own policy manifest stated on page 3 that he would implement the new carbon tax to "generate billions of dollars in new revenue". This kind of sweeping tax would have national implications and it would also mean that my constituents would have to pay more for everything.

The NDP needs to realize that its \$21 billion carbon tax plan would hurt all Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1420)

[Translation]

FOOD SAFETY

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for 43 days now, the Minister of Agriculture has not been doing his job, so much so that the Public Health Agency of Canada has had to take charge. The agency has done more in the past few days to inform Canadians of the state of the tainted meat crisis than the minister has done in a month and a half. Really, the Minister of Agriculture has become redundant.

When will he step aside and let someone responsible take his place?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said several times, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for dealing with this situation.

It is very clear that the safety of our food is the CFIA's priority and that this plant will not reopen until the CFIA is able to confirm what is happening.

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Minister of Agriculture is still refusing to take responsibility, will the Minister of Health step in? The Conservatives have been creating confusion about the duration of the recall and the number of Canadians who have been infected for 43 days now.

We want to know whether the delay in recalling the meat exposed more Canadians to tainted beef. Can the Conservatives explain why Canadians became ill from eating beef after September 13?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for dealing with this situation. Once this incident is concluded, all the facts and the situation will be reviewed.

The CFIA is doing its job.

[English]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for weeks the minister has either been missing in action or avoiding answering questions. He has ignored his responsibility to the lab coats when he gets pointed questions. He blames the company when contaminated meat makes it into the food chain. He refuses to give details about his department to anyone who asks.

If the minister is not capable of being accountable, why will he not step aside? Why will he not resign?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not the minister who does food inspection; it is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that does food inspection.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's first objective is to ensure Canadian food is safe. That is why it has taken a number of steps, including and up to shutting down the plant, which will not be reopened until the food is safe.

All these matters are following the practices the government put in place, subject to review when this incident is concluded.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in November 2010, the Minister of National Defence told the House, "there will be no combat role for our military in Kandahar past July 2011". The Prime Minister said that military activity would be limited to guarding the embassy at Kabul.

We now know Canadian soldiers have been sent to combat operations in Kandahar. Yesterday in the House the Minister of National Defence referred to the mission as "professional development". Are there any other combat operations disguised as professional development about which the minister would like to inform the House?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it could be none, or none he is prepared to admit.

The minister said that no Canadian Forces members would be involved in combat operations, but on the weekend a CF spokesperson said that members were “permitted to be in Kandahar province and to serve in combat roles”.

Why did the minister mislead the House in 2010? Why can we not trust the minister and the Prime Minister at their word? Why will Conservatives not respect the motion passed by this House of Commons?

• (1425)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be clear, Canada's combat role in Afghanistan, in Kandahar, has ended.

With respect to a small number of Canadian Forces members who are on exchanges with NATO allies, this in fact has been a long-standing practice of the Canadian Forces. It is a long-standing practice of which the member is well aware. This is in the spirit of the motions before Parliament. This is very much about Canada continuing its long-standing commitment to work with our allies in Afghanistan and around the world.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just told the House that the Minister of Agriculture was not responsible for inspecting food. Presumably, the Minister of Agriculture is responsible for telling the truth to the House of Commons. He told the House three weeks ago that there was no tainted meat on store shelves. He has been completely discredited with respect to that statement.

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister. Why will he not enforce ministerial responsibility, the principle that ministers are responsible to the House and to the people of Canada for the jobs they have? The Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Health are responsible for protecting the health of Canadians. When are they going to take that—

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

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I said was it was not politicians who did food inspection. It is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The government has provided resources to that organization, which has taken in this incident a number of progressive steps to deal with this problem at the factory, up to and including the shutting down of the factory.

The government's priority, as is the CFIA's priority, will be to ensure that factory is not reopened until such time as it operates safely.

OMNIBUS LEGISLATION

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is unable to enforce the most basic principles of ministerial accountability. Let us see how he does with respect to his own words and his own statements.

When the House was debating the question of omnibus bills in the past, the member for Calgary Southwest said, “the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles”. He then went on to say, “We can agree with some of the measures but oppose others. How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse?”

Why does the Prime Minister not agree with those words today?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party is correct in observing that this procedure was debated some 20 years ago and decisions were taken at that time. The government is acting within the spirit and letter of those decisions.

We are very proud of the fact that we have before the House a very comprehensive economic action plan to which this government is responsible to the House of Commons. These are important measures to ensure that the Canadian economy continues its superior performance among developed nations.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone can clearly see the difficulty facing this government, which has ministers who will not accept responsibility. It has a Prime Minister who refuses to tell his ministers that they have a duty to tell Canadians the truth in the House of Commons. These ministers blame everyone else and refuse to take responsibility for what they said when they were in opposition. How hypocritical.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I respect the rulings handed down 20 years ago by the Speaker of the House of Commons. We have before this House a very comprehensive economic action plan and I hope Parliament will support it.

[*English*]

I understand that the Liberal Party wants a separate legislative package for MP pensions so they can get a special deal and a special process. We are determined to act comprehensively across all economic matters.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the same weekend that XL laid off employees, it also sent out a statement criticizing CFIA's re-certification process. How did the minister respond to this attack on his own department? He called it a “private sector business decision”, once again shirking his own responsibility for this fiasco.

Oral Questions

Sadly, it is Canadian farmers and ranchers who are going to be hurt the most from Conservative mismanagement.

Why is the minister washing his hands of this and why will he not stand up for Canadian farmers?

• (1430)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. From day one, we have acted on this issue. CFIA was involved immediately. It notified public health officials, who continue to scour the country, looking for anyone affected by this tainted product. We look for all those illness. Hopefully, there will be no more.

We have had a number of technical briefings in this same time frame to keep Canadians up to speed on what is done and what needs to be done to ensure their food is safe.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know what the priority of the government is. It is to flood Canadian TVs with advertising all about the Canada's action plan. It spends tens of millions of dollars, but it has cut funding for food safety. Yet the minister refuses to explain why the government is cutting food inspectors.

We asked for details on sick Canadians. The minister will not answer. We asked for a list of CFIA's inspectors. The minister has no answer.

That is a minister guided by politics and self-preservation, not accountability. When will he finally stand in the House and tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the decisions made to this point over this issue have not been political decisions. These are science-based, rational decisions made by the professional people at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and at public health agencies both federally and provincially. That is a good thing.

The only political decisions that have to be made are to continue to building the capacity of CFIA and public health to get those jobs done. We hope the NDP will join us in that endeavour.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we still have not heard an answer. While Canadians continue to get sick and livestock producers worry about their income, what is the minister doing? He still refuses to accept his responsibility.

Last week, I met with stakeholders and discussed the matter with some producers. I heard a great deal of criticism regarding the minister's failure to take action. People do not understand why he refuses to address the safety needs in the cattle industry.

Instead of posing for photo ops, will the minister come up with a plan to restore consumer confidence in the industry?

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the one thing this government has in common with the cattle sector,

whether we talk about the cow-calf operators, feedlot operators or the processors themselves, is that we all agree that consumer confidence is based in food safety. To that end, we continue to build the robust food safety system that is required. We have some more tools coming to the House, hopefully the latter part of this week or early next week, Bill S-11, the safe food for Canadians act. We hope the New Democrats will help us move that expeditiously.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture is not the only one who has a complicated relationship with the public.

Let us look at the facts. First, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development said that all workers would benefit from the new working while on claim project. Then, she admitted that, in fact, all workers would not benefit. Unable to offer a solution to all unemployed workers in Canada, she split them into two groups: those who would be entitled and those who would not.

It is all smoke and mirrors with the minister. When will she fix the program so that it benefits all unemployed workers?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's priority is job creation, economic growth and the security of Canadians. That is why we try to eliminate obstacles that prevent unemployed people from working. With the new system, the pilot project, that is exactly what we will do. And we introduced changes so that people who were receiving benefits while working, last year, are integrated into the new system.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister simply has nothing to offer unemployed Canadians except empty words. She talks of jobs but her government put forward a reckless job-killing budget that New Democrats were proud to vote against.

The fact is few will benefit from the minister's changes to working while on claim. The majority will still be worse off now than before the minister started tinkering. People looking for work deserve better. When will the minister get to work and fix the mess that she created?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats have just admitted that they were proud to vote against all the initiatives that have helped to create 820,000 new jobs in our country, the best record in the G7 in terms of job creation. They voted against all the initiatives to help people who had lost their jobs get back to work. Our working while on claim pilot project will support individuals who have lost their jobs get back to work. The job alerts program that we have multiplied will help Canadians get back to work.

We are helping Canadians get back to work. The New Democrats are voting against Canadians.

• (1435)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives continue to show they just do not understand Atlantic Canada. Now they are denying EI benefits to more than 180 people because they work for family members. Atlantic Canada and our many fishing communities are built on family businesses and they should not be penalized. Not everyone can work for a large corporation.

Why will the government not start helping fishing communities instead of trying to punish them?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has his facts all wrong. There are many situations where family members can work and receive EI benefits.

The situation he is talking about is where 60 individuals have been directly affected by a multi-year investigation into fraud and deliberate misrepresentation that is cheating Canadians out of millions of dollars of EI payments. The process and the investigations are ongoing. If the charges are proven to be true, then appropriate action will be taken by the federal courts.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly how Atlantic Canadians feel, that they are being attacked by the government.

Let us talk about the fishing industry and how the government continues to download costs.

Management of the fishery is a shared responsibility but the government is slashing funding for the at-sea observer program and offloading its full cost, and costing fishermen and their families an extra \$100 a day in expenses.

The attack on Atlantic communities continues. When will the government start working with our fishing industry and our—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is ensuring that we provide the services to Canadians in the most efficient and effective way possible.

When Canadians benefit from those services, as some do in the fishing industry by monitoring or gear identification and so on, we expect those who benefit from it to pay their share of it, and that is what we are doing in this case.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has felt the cut of the Conservative knife. Over 100 jobs have been eliminated, millions in grants have slashed and regional development agencies are starved but Conservative patronage appointee Kevin MacAdam still has his job, even while he spends years learning French, collecting a salary and living expenses from Canadian taxpayers.

The Public Service Commission ruled that this pork patronage broke the rules. Therefore, why is the former aid to the Minister of National Defence still drawing a salary and living expenses from Canadian taxpayers?

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 answered that question yesterday and the answer is the same today.

This is not a political issue. However, if the member wants to check the public court records, they state that the commissioner found problems with the way the public service ran its hiring process but did not find any political interference by ministers or political staff.

In the meantime, this matter is before the courts.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's priority is to flood our TVs with government propaganda, spending tens of millions of dollars on ads, but cutting funding for Atlantic economic development.

No one believes there was no political interference. No one believes that Kevin MacAdam would have got this patronage post if he had not been a buddy of the Minister of National Defence. This Conservative government's defence comes from MacAdam's court filing, hardly an objective source.

If the Conservatives claim to have nothing to hide will they now release the full report of the Public Service Commission?

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, this is within the purview of the Public Service Commission. The hon. member should listen to what the Public Service Commissioner had to say. He said very clearly that the commission had found problems with the way the Public Service ran the hiring process. He also clearly said that it did not find any political interference by ministers or political staff.

I want to know where the hon. member is getting his information because it is incorrect.

* * *

● (1440)

PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CFIA's job is to keep bacteria like E. coli out of our food. Once bacteria has entered the food chain, it is clearly a public health issue.

Canadians are worried and our Public Health Agency legislation is very clear. When Canadians are worried, government must provide a trusted public health voice to speak to them directly.

Will the Minister of Health finally do her job, stop muzzling the Public Health Agency of Canada and allow it to speak directly to Canadians about the safety of their food?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Public Health Agency has been working with the provinces and territories from the very beginning of this process and it continues to do so.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Health has the floor.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis, the Public Health Agency has been dealing with the public as well as the provinces and the territories in providing support on this matter.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a month after the government finally notified Canadians that meat from XL Foods was contaminated with E. coli, we still do not have answers to reassure Canadian consumers.

XL Foods' failure to follow safety standards and the government's failure to police the industry and protect and communicate with consumers keeps compounding the harm to our ranchers and egg industry.

The minister called for science, not politics, in dealing with the outbreak. Will he take his own advice, admit there were not enough resources to protect our food safety and finally order the third party comprehensive resource audit CFIA badly needs?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done exactly that. After a decade of Liberal cuts, we have continued to build a robust food safety system. We are adding manpower. We are adding budgetary availability to it at every turn.

We continue to have technical briefings. We were having them almost daily throughout the middle of this issue. I am not sure why members opposite did not take advantage of a technical briefing we offered them. Instead, they decided to have a political emergency debate rather than find out the actual issues.

Oral Questions

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we asked if Kevin MacAdam continued to draw down a six-figure salary at ACOA, and political interference or not, the fact remains that the Public Service Commission ordered his position terminated for improprieties.

We want to know if Mr. MacAdam continues to collect thousands of dollars in additional living expenses and if he is continuing his full-time French language training.

If the minister will finally answer those questions, will he also answer another one? Who will be paying the legal costs for MacAdam's court challenges to the Public Service Commission? Will it be the government or Mr. MacAdam?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Public Service Commissioner reported on this issue. He found problems with the way that the public service ran its hiring practice. That is no secret. Everybody in the House knows that. However, the commissioner did not find any political interference by ministers or political staff.

I realize the opposition would make this a political issue but it is not a political issue. The Public Service Commission has clearly stated that. In the meantime, this matter is before the courts.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, official languages are pretty far down the Conservative government's list of priorities.

In his most recent report, the Commissioner of Official Languages again pointed out problems at Air Canada, Parks Canada and Elections Canada.

The Official Languages Act has been around for 43 years. Both linguistic communities have had equal rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms for the past 30 years.

Why do the Conservatives accept these setbacks for Canada's official languages?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are no setbacks. There are actually real successes. That is what the Commissioner of Official Languages said.

I have his report, which reads:

The Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013: Acting for the Future [which is our government's plan] recognizes the importance of increasing the level of bilingualism among young Canadians...

Oral Questions

These programs are working. There are success stories, and we are continuing with our program, our policies and our investments to protect, promote and celebrate Canada's two official languages.

• (1445)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the programs are working, but the Commissioner is asking that they be put in place.

Does the government want examples of the setbacks? A year ago, the Minister of Industry announced the creation of a committee on the French language. Where is this committee? The government appointed a unilingual anglophone to the position of auditor general and is closing the only bilingual Canadian search and rescue centre, which is located in Quebec City. If that is the government's commitment to the official languages, I am not impressed.

If the minister is so concerned about official languages, why is he allowing his government to dismantle so many bilingual institutions one after the other?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is truly ridiculous.

The government's programs, investments and policies have resulted in real successes for francophone communities outside Quebec and for bilingualism across Canada. We are making investments and establishing programs as never before, and our approach has resulted in real successes for all of Canada.

In each region of the country, there are real programs with real successes and we will continue in that direction for both official languages of Canada.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week we are celebrating Small Business Week.

Ironically, we have just learned that Industry Canada wants to make terrible changes to the small business loan program. Small businesses and taxpayers will once again be the biggest losers as a result of an ill-advised Conservative decision.

Over the next 10 years, taxpayers and borrowers can expect to face additional costs of \$41 million and \$233 million respectively. The only winners will be the banks, which will be better off by \$141 million.

How can the minister justify this particularly ill-timed announcement this week?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we consulted widely and changes will be made to reduce red tape, reduce the amount of fraud and increase the amount of finances that are available to our small businesses in Canada so they can grow, hire more people and improve our economy. What we will not do is impose a \$21 billion carbon tax that will hurt seniors, hurt students and kill small businesses.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not complicated. We are talking about access to credit for small businesses. That is what we are talking about. Can the members opposite talk about this?

According to Pierre Cléroux, the BDC's chief economist, very small businesses are the ones that have the most difficulty accessing credit. The recent Conservative announcements have not provided any reassurance. Industry Canada claims that the new plan will increase access to loans, but the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is of the opinion that the new regulations will decrease the number of loan applications.

Will the minister commit to implementing a program that will truly guarantee much-needed credit support for small businesses?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we are doing. In fact, this government is committed to creating an environment that will help businesses grow.

I know the NDP is against businesses in general. However, we are ensuring that businesses have better access to the finances they need to grow their business, hire more Canadians and improve our economy. What they do not want and we will not do is impose a \$21 billion carbon tax. That will kill jobs and hurt businesses. Increasing taxes will make it harder for businesses to get a loan.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years, families in the north have demanded a better alternative to the old food mail program.

Our government responded to these calls by putting in place nutrition north Canada, which is focused on bringing healthier, more nutritious foods to the north at a lower price to consumers.

I wonder if the minister could update this House on whether families in the north have seen lower prices for food as a result of these changes.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to report that the nutrition north program is doing exactly that.

In some northern communities, we have seen individual prices for things like milk drop as much as 37%. Northerners have asked for changes to the eligible product list so that the subsidy can go directly toward perishable food items, such as fresh bread, vegetables, meat and milk.

Northerners have asked for better food choices at more affordable prices and that is what we are delivering.

Oral Questions

● (1450)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the following is what the Prime Minister said in a speech on May 29, 2008, in London, England. He said:

I should mention that while our plan will effectively establish a price on carbon of \$65 a tonne, growing to that rate over the next decade, our Government has opted not to apply carbon taxes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Members are to hold off on their applause until the person posing the question is finished. The hon. member for Halifax has the floor and we do not need any more interruptions.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, why does the Prime Minister want to put a tax on everything?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for highlighting the difference between our approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the NDP's desire to put a carbon tax on everything.

The green shift of the Liberal Party only proposed \$15 billion worth of carbon taxes and the NDP members want \$20 billion worth of carbon taxes, something the economy cannot take and something Canadians will never accept.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be some confusion among the Conservatives.

In the past, the Prime Minister expressed his intention to establish the price of carbon at \$65 a tonne. Now, he is changing his story. For the Conservatives, a price on carbon is a tax on carbon.

Do the Conservatives now deny that the Prime Minister said that a price on carbon was not a carbon tax?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the quotation from the member, it is clear that the government would not impose a tax on carbon. It is quite the opposite.

[*English*]

The difference is simply this. No plan ever proposed by this government has involved raising revenue and taking money from Canadian consumers.

They have in their platform, right in black and white in their financial tables, a \$20 billion hit on Canadian consumers and households, something this government will never do.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they asked.

It seems that the Conservatives are caught in a vicious cycle here. They are either claiming that the Prime Minister never gave a speech that one can find on the PMO website, or that a price on carbon is not a tax on carbon.

Is there anyone over on that side who will stand up and defend the Prime Minister on his position that a carbon tax is not the same as a price on carbon?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: This is really eating up a lot of time. These outbursts before the member is finished putting the question are not helpful. The hon. member for Halifax still has the floor.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, will they defend the Prime Minister or will they throw him under the bus?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member keeps leading with her chin, I am prepared to keep going for it.

This government, the Minister of the Environment, has taken important steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this country including, most recently, a comprehensive plan to gradually eliminate coal-fired electricity in this country, which is the biggest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world. We are doing that without imposing taxes on carbon.

The NDP, in the name of environmental progress, wants to take money from Canadian taxpayers to spend. We will not let them do that.

* * *

● (1455)

ETHICS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Conservatives are caught in a bit of an ethical dilemma here. They are making things up about the NDP; they are denying that they ever supported a price on carbon—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Halifax has had several interruptions during her questions. It is not helpful to the Chamber, and it is eating up a lot of time. We will have to find that time somewhere else now.

The hon. member for Halifax still has the floor.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, day after day Conservative MPs and ministers are making things up. They are spouting mistruths and they are misleading Canadians. This is a major ethical issue.

My question is for the chair of the ethics committee. I would like to know whether or not this issue is on the committee's agenda.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her very apt question.

The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics deals with very important matters. The committee is currently conducting a study on privacy and social media.

[*English*]

In committee or in the House, MPs should conduct themselves in a very ethical manner, including not making things up about other parties.

Conservative tactics have been denounced widely, with some media even asking how stupid the Conservatives think Canadians are.

As the chair of the ethics committee, I invite my colleagues across the way to address that question in committee if they want.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one year ago Canada's negotiator on CETA told the trade committee that government had done internal analysis on the issue of drug costs. However, the minister refused us that study stating: "No, they're not available to this committee".

Now the Canadian Press, based on these studies, has confirmed our worst fear that European patents will increase Canadian drug costs by \$2 billion per year.

Will the minister admit to these additional drug costs to Canadians as a result of CETA, and will he now allow the committee access to that analysis in full?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member may not have been paying attention, but this trade agreement is still being negotiated. These negotiations are still going on. Nothing has been decided at this point.

I would say that our government always thought to strike a balance between promoting innovation and job creation and ensuring that Canadians continue to have access to the affordable drugs that they need. I would finally say that the House can be assured that our government will not sign the agreement unless it is in the best interest of all Canadians.

* * *

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked a straightforward question to the Minister of Industry. I even complimented the government. What I got was a rather bizarre response, so I will try again.

Last week, during the International Summit of Cooperatives, a \$30 million fund was created to support co-operatives in the province of Quebec. The Business Development Bank, a federal institution, is putting \$10 million in the fund. Here is my question. I hope the minister is listening. When can we expect similar announcements from the BDC for co-ops in the other provinces and territories of Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing bizarre about listing the good measures we have taken for co-operatives, which are an economic driver in Canada.

As the hon. opposition member knows, the Business Development Bank of Canada operates independently of the government. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to speculate on the BDC's future plans. The committee tabled its report in September. We are reviewing that report and will respond to it in due course.

* * *

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar has sent

out a mail-out gloating about health care cuts to refugee claimants. She is bragging about denying medication for kidney disease to an elderly woman or care to a young woman who is 18 weeks—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1500)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Newton—North Delta has the floor.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: —or care to a young woman who is 18 weeks pregnant due to a sexual assault. The government is gambling with the health of refugee claimants. This flyer is offensive and misleading. Will the member apologize?

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been very clear when it comes to interim federal health in this country. They believe that each and every Canadian should be treated exactly the same as anyone applying for refugee status in this country. We have changed the interim federal health. Those who want to become refugees and are applying to do so in this country will receive the medical treatment that each and every other Canadian would, but they should not receive in excess of the treatment that any Canadian would under any provincial health plan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts instead of changing the subject.

In the householder sent to her constituents, the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar welcomed the cuts to health services provided to the most vulnerable. What she fails to mention is that health clinics are overcrowded and the cost borne by the provinces is going up. There is absolutely nothing noble about any of that.

When will the government put an end to its devastating cuts to programs for the most vulnerable in our society?

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear that across this country, when it comes to health care, when it comes to treatment, when it comes to understanding what it is to become a Canadian in this country, what it is to become a permanent resident, there is a process that will be followed. Those who fall within the rules, those who fall within being a Canadian, becoming a permanent resident or a refugee under the UN, will receive the health care they deserve; but those who come here to take advantage of our country, to take advantage of our system, to take advantage of our process, that is not what this government is going to support.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are bound together by a rich cultural diversity and by an inspiring history that points us to an even brighter future.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

This year, 2012, is the start of the five-year countdown to Canada's 150th birthday in 2017. We have an unprecedented opportunity to celebrate our history and the successes that define us and unite us as Canadians.

[English]

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages please tell the House what our government is doing to help Canadians better understand and appreciate our heritage and showcase our legacy to the world?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I was very pleased to be joined by historians and museum leaders from all across Canada to celebrate our government's decision to create the Canadian Museum of History, le Musée canadien de l'histoire.

Canada has an incredibly rich and diverse history. We have stories all across the country that deserve to be told. We are taking the largest museum in all of Canada and we are going to make it even larger, broadening its mandate to include all Canadians so we can tell all of Canada's stories.

John McAvity, who is the executive director of the Canadian Museums Association, said the renaming of this museum is essential. "This is good news." It will give Canadians greater access to their heritage and to their history.

Supporting Canadian history is what—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Commissioner Fraser just released his report. And once again, two areas are problematic: the lack of leadership shown by this government and Air Canada's failure to obey the law.

This is not the first time Air Canada has violated the Official Languages Act. Will the government demonstrate the appropriate leadership and force Air Canada to abide by the Official Languages Act?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I completely disagree with the premise of the question.

At the beginning of her question, the member said there was a lack of leadership. In reality, however, the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages reads as follows:

The Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013...[our investment policy for official languages] recognizes the importance of increasing the level of bilingualism among young Canadians and sets out federal investments.... These programs are working.

It is working; we are getting results. We will continue to protect and promote both of Canada's official languages.

● (1505)

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation at Canada Post has been getting worse and worse since the Conservatives came to power. As solutions they offer nothing better than reducing post office business hours and making cuts to services in rural areas.

The ship is sinking, and all the Conservatives are doing is taking an axe to the hull. Canadians and Quebeckers no longer recognize the postal service they loved.

Does the minister have a development plan for Canada Post, or is his solution still to close more offices?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take exception to everything the member just said. The government has been watching Canada Post, which is an arm's-length corporation, and proceeding with a transformational \$2 billion investment to get it into the 21st century.

I would like to remind members and Canadians that the opposition party blocked the attempt of the government to get the mail to Canadians. By the way, mail would cost a lot more with a carbon tax.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Conservatives came to power, they have done their best to undermine Library and Archives Canada. Their cuts and neglect are jeopardizing the preservation of thousands of historic documents.

If the Conservatives really love Canadian history, they must protect our archives. This is about our history and our heritage, which must absolutely be preserved.

The Conservatives would rather rob Peter to pay Paul. Instead of rewriting and politicizing Canadian history, and leaving taxpayers on the hook for millions of dollars, can the minister confirm that Library and Archives Canada will maintain complete control over Canadian archives?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Library and Archives Canada will actually be an important part of the new Canadian Museum of History as we move forward, because it is the guardian of a lot of our past. It will be a very large part of this project as we move forward.

I hope that the NDP will actually decide to support this initiative, because this is in fact an effort to bring all Canadians together to talk about all of Canada's stories. Therefore, I would hope that my hon. colleague would put away the rhetoric he has used yesterday and today in the House and would work with me and other members of Parliament to make this institution what it should be, which is an institution for all Canadians.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives definitely love history, especially when it can be altered to suit their interpretation. Why bother with reality when symbols will do?

The Conservatives are spending tens of millions of dollars to celebrate a war that took place 200 years ago—they are exaggerating its importance, especially to francophones—and now they are changing the mandate and the name of one of the top museums, located in Quebec, in order to glorify the Conservative version of the Canadian identity.

Why do the Conservatives want to politicize history?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not the case. We are working with the museum. It makes decisions about its programming independent of the government.

Marie Lalonde, a leader in Canada's museums community, said that, "in partnership with this new museum, local museums will be able to offer their visitors distinctive exhibits and initiatives that would otherwise not be available."

Our support today for this new project will help all museums across Canada, including Quebec museums. It is unfortunate that the Bloc Québécois continues to be against Quebec.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the 2012 Indspire Awards recipients: Gabrielle Scrimshaw, Elizabeth Zarpa, Graham Koto-wich, Jacqueline Guest, Charlie Evalik, Winston Wuttunee, National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, Lloyd (Sonny) Flett, Ruby Jacobs, Viola Robinson, Duane Smith, Gail Cyr, Theo Fleury and Alex Van Bibber.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1510)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in question period the deputy leader of the NDP suggested that in our referencing the NDP proposal for a carbon tax, something was being made up. I just ask for the consent of the House to table page 3 of the NDP costing, which sets out its \$21.5 billion carbon tax proposal, so that the members of the NDP, by seeing their own platform, can know that we did not just make it up.

The Speaker: I assume that the hon. member is asking for unanimous consent, because the page is not in both official languages.

Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—OMNIBUS LEGISLATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor had concluded his speech and is now looking for questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to—

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. members to continue their conversations outside the House of Commons.

The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that this motion be presented here today in the House. Although this government has opposed the introduction of omnibus bills in the past, it now introduces omnibus bills that are even longer than the ones it once opposed.

Does my colleague believe it is fair and relevant to move such a motion here today and to debate it in greater detail in the House?

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the whole question, due to the noise in the House. Can I call upon you to ask the member to do that once again? I apologize but it is too loud in here.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a great deal of sympathy from the Chair in that regard.

The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan, please repeat the question.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise again in the House to repeat the question for my colleague.

I will take a simpler approach. Only a few short years ago, when the government was on the opposition benches, it opposed omnibus bills. Yet it now introduces omnibus bills that are longer than ever, without taking into account the fact that some of the items included in these omnibus bills should be examined and discussed in committees other than the Standing Committee on Finance.

Does he not find it a little unusual to have an opposition day on such a topic today, when we should not have to do so?

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, indeed that is the pattern we have seen over the past little while. Interestingly, the member brings up the part about the committees and that it should not just be the finance committee that should look at this.

When the Conservatives first got into power, they had a clean air act, as they called it. To do that, they created a special legislative committee to deal with that particular piece of legislation. It is not a bad idea. That is one of the options as well. If they felt the need to do it then, why do we not do it now?

In this particular situation, it is being jammed through a bottleneck in many respects. It is not serving any constituents in any regard because of the lack of information. It does not matter if someone lives in Toronto or Vancouver, Halifax, Plate Cove West or anywhere really. When we consider it, none of this stuff has really seen the light of day. I cannot think of one piece in this that has received ample amount of attention in this House so that we can vote on it responsibly.

• (1515)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns I have heard about the omnibus bill program of the Conservative government is that it contributes to apathy about our political process. We know that is symptomatic of a democratic decline in Canada, especially among young people who choose not to vote.

I would like my colleague to comment on youth, how to engage them and how this motion might help with that.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have trouble doing in the House is engaging in a much larger conversation that includes seniors, ethnic communities within cities and rural communities outside of urban centres and, certainly, the other community to speak of here would be the youth.

The problem is that if we put all of this into one bill and vote on it very quickly, none of the issues that are important to Canadians becomes a tangible issue because the bill is handled so quickly. To make an issue tangible we have to put it into a forum where we can actually discuss ways of doing this.

There are big changes coming to employment insurance for youth. If youth have a job that is filling the gap and they are laid off and are on employment insurance, they would like to get experience that would give them a better job in the future. However, if there is a financial disincentive to their doing that, they are not going to do it. The government is not giving us that tangible discussion in what we would consider to be a respectable debate.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address this speech especially to the students at Frontenac Secondary School in Kingston and the Islands whom I met last week. I want to thank them for being interested in government and I am sorry for the future taxes they may have to pay to fix the problems that we create or ignore today because we did not think carefully enough about legislation.

To the people of Kingston and the Islands, I ask whether they would like their tax dollars to be well spent and whether they would like their government to make good laws. In Canada, citizens elect

people to go to Ottawa and check on what the Prime Minister and the government are doing. They elect people to go to Ottawa to study what the government proposes to do with their money and what laws the government proposes they should obey. They elect a person to go to Ottawa to voice approval or disapproval, to vote for or against what the government wants to do, and they should get to know how their member of Parliament voted.

There is a majority in the House of Commons. The government has a majority in the House and a majority in every committee, and so it can and does win every vote that it wants to. If the government can win every vote, why bother voting on anything? Is it not like a force out in baseball? Why do we not just take all of the government spending proposals and all the new laws, put them into one big omnibus bill, have one vote and be done with it? This is what is happening with the bills to implement the budget and all the extra stuff that the government is adding to these budget bills.

Let me give some numbers. Between 1995 and 2000, according to Ned Franks, the budget implementation acts averaged about 12 pages in length. From 2001 to 2008, they averaged 139 pages. In 2009, however, the budget implementation legislation added up to 580 pages, and in 2010, it was 880 pages. Most recently this year, it was 450 pages, so it has really grown a lot. More importantly, the bills contain not just minor amendments to implement the budget, as was the case 10 years ago, but more importantly all sorts of unrelated subject matter. That is what we are complaining about today.

The budget is complicated enough. It has changes to taxes that are very complicated and financial regulations that require a lot of expertise. We need to look at it carefully. We need to ask experts. We need to check for problems and unintended consequences, instead of paying up later with expensive court costs, hoping that the courts will fix the legislation, or having to go back and pass entirely new legislation.

Normally we are supposed to research bills carefully to see if there is anything special to say from the point of view of our constituents. We are supposed to listen to any reaction from our constituents, listen to expert witnesses in relevant committees and make amendments to any bill to improve it. When bills like the omnibus bill contain so many things, we do not have the time to review all of them. Omnibus bills for the budget have been like that for the last four years. Special items are not sent to their respective committee for examination by experts. We do not give bills the scrutiny that they deserve and that our constituents deserve.

Business of Supply

Conservative members of Parliament who dutifully obey their whip, show up, read the words on their cards, vote as they are told and vote for the budget bill are voting to spend the tax dollars of Canadians and make laws blindly. As Rick Mercer said, it is simply like reading online when it says “by clicking the 'I accept' button....”, and we agree and proceed to click without thinking. That is what we do online, but we should not do that on such important matters as spending billions of dollars in taxes and making laws that Canadians have to obey. We are elected and paid to do more than just click the “I accept” button.

In a majority government, the government may win every vote, but it is Parliament's duty to listen, to study, to criticize, to suggest improvements and to communicate the problems back to Canadians. Sometimes when Canadians realize that there is an important problem, they do speak up and a majority government does change what it does. However, that cannot happen with an omnibus bill. It is very difficult with all these matters and different subjects crowded into one bill and pushed through in such a short time.

●(1520)

It is our duty to talk about how each step the government takes will affect Canadians and our constituents. We should be able to vote on unrelated items separately. The people we represent should be able to know how we vote on each item. For example, our constituents will want to know where we stand on eliminating environmental reviews, pension changes, food safety inspections, federal fair wages, cross-border law enforcement, the Seeds Act, foreign ownership of small telecom companies and changes to the Parole Board.

All of these very different initiatives were in the omnibus bill this past summer. By burying all of them in one bill and having a single vote, members of Parliament have no option but to vote either for some things that are bad for constituents or against some things that are good for their constituents. The funny thing is that later on in the future the Conservatives will stand up and say that we cannot criticize them on a particular issue because we voted against legislation where they tried to do something about it, when the truth is that the legislation contained all sorts of other bad changes that we had to vote against.

Let us then agree with a younger version of the member for Calgary Southwest, who is now our Prime Minister, from a time when there was, I believe, still a bit of principled conservatism in him, back in 1994. He criticized omnibus bills by saying that dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent the views of their constituents on each of the different components of the bill.

Let us today change the way we do business in the House for the benefit of Canadians so that we may, as we pray every morning, make good laws and wise decisions. Let us do that for the benefit of the young students at Frontenac Secondary School in Kingston and the Islands to whom this speech is dedicated, so that they will not have to pay higher taxes to fix the problems that we create or ignore because we did not think carefully enough about new laws or how to spend tax dollars.

●(1525)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member pointed out a 1994 issue with respect to a budget bill. If he is correct, that means that the Liberal Party brought forward a similar bill to what we have here at this time.

The other major difference between that time and now is that we have been debating many of these issues from election to election yet were unable to pass the legislation due to a minority Parliament. However, the debate on these issues in the House of Commons has been extensive. Looking at it since 2006, one could argue that many of the issues have been debated for six years.

Therefore, now that the government has a mandate from the electorate and the fact that these measures need to be taken in order to deal with a fragile economic recovery, perhaps the member's position is ill-placed at this time.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rebut what the hon. Minister of State has said.

He referred to a bill back in 1994, which was criticized by the member for Calgary West, who is now the Prime Minister. That budget implementation bill, Bill C-17, was only 21 pages.

In 2010, the current Conservative government brought forward a budget implementation bill of 880 pages. The budget implementation bill this past summer affected 70 different acts. Therefore, there is really a qualitative gap between what a previous government was doing and what the current government is doing.

In addition, the member mentioned that we have been debating a lot of issues since 2006. Have we been debating federal fair wages in the House? Have we been debating the Seeds Act? Have we been debating cross-border law enforcement changes? Have we been debating those changes to the Parole Board or foreign ownership of small telecoms? I do not think we have been debating those issues.

There are a lot of initiatives that were not even mentioned in the budget that were put into the budget implementation bill. That is how little we have been debating some of the miscellaneous changes contained within the omnibus bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the NDP will be pleased to support the Liberal motion today. We agree with the Liberals' point that when the Prime Minister was in the official opposition a few years ago, he said that the Liberals were wrong in introducing omnibus bills, when that is exactly what the Conservatives are doing now.

Does my colleague not find that the omnibus bills being introduced in the House—which we do not have the time to debate and which are not sent to the appropriate committees—undermine the confidence of Canadians, especially the future generation looking to get involved in politics? I would like to know what he thinks about that.

Business of Supply

Mr. Ted Hsu: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That is why I addressed my speech to the students at Frontenac Secondary School, in my riding, since what we fail to do today will affect them in the future.

• (1530)

[English]

As far as I am concerned, there is a cost to this. I would call it the omnibus bill tax, which means that if we are ignoring problems or not thinking legislation through carefully today, we are going to be imposing costs on future generations. I would call it the omnibus tax-on-everything bill.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to the Liberal opposition day motion today.

It should come as no surprise to members in this House that I certainly can confirm that our government will not be supporting the motion. I think other speakers before me have mentioned the same thing.

However, I do want to talk about the motion a bit before I get into the reasons that we oppose it.

As every member of this place knows, each opposition party, throughout the course of a parliamentary session, has a limited amount of days in which it can bring forward opposition motions, also known as supply days or opposition days, and the motions that the opposition parties can bring forward can be of their own choosing.

The reason I mention that is because this is the Liberals' last opposition day for the fall session. As a subject, they could have chosen a number of different topics that would be more relevant and more important than what they have done here. They could have, for example, brought forward a motion to discuss the recent EI changes that our government made. They could have brought forward a motion to discuss the government's plan to change the age for old age security payments. They could have even brought forward a motion to discuss MP pensions because this is a subject that all the Liberal members over the past few weeks have talked about quite frequently. They have stated that they wanted to bring forward some suggestions, some ideas, about changes to MP pensions. I am sure that would have had the attention of every member of this House. Instead, however, they brought forward an opposition day motion dealing with a quote of nearly 20 years ago.

Why did they do that? Clearly, they did it for one reason. They wanted to try to create mischief. They wanted to try to bring forward a motion that they felt would, in some small way, embarrass the government or perhaps embarrass the Prime Minister.

However, it has no real importance in the day-to-day lives of Canadians. It has no real importance in terms of what we do in this institution because it does not bring forward any policy positions that the Liberals may want to advance. That is a sad commentary on the state of the Liberal Party today.

Rather than bringing forward something of substance, perhaps a new policy idea that the Liberals wish to advance or perhaps they wanted to critique or criticize the government on some of the policy

positions that we have taken, but they did not do that. By their own choosing, they decided to bring forward a motion simply for political partisan purposes to try to embarrass the government. That is not what this place is for. At least in my opinion, that is not what this place is for.

I give credit to the official opposition. Even though I fundamentally and profoundly disagree with it on most of its policy positions, at least I will give it full credit for bringing forward, during its opposition days, ideas and policy initiatives that it would like to see debated. We, during the course of those opposition days, have vigorous and sometimes very passionate debates, but at least they were, in most part, debates that were worth having in this place.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, the motion put forward by the Liberal Party today is beneath the level of discussion that this place should have.

I would also point out, as members opposite well know, that, from a procedural standpoint, omnibus bills have been procedurally proven to be in order. Many Speakers over the last number of decades have made this ruling, from Speaker Lamoureux to Speaker Fraser. They have stated that omnibus bills are procedurally in order and that governments can bring forward omnibus bills, packaging a number of related pieces of legislation under one bill, and they can debate them and bring them forward for passage.

One of the most ardent supporter and defender of omnibus bills was former Speaker Peter Milliken. Before Mr. Milliken became Speaker of this House, he was parliamentary secretary to the government House leader of the Liberal government of the day. I mention Mr. Milliken because I think most members in this place would consider former Speaker Milliken to be one of the most, if not the most, knowledgeable Speakers in terms of the procedures and practices of Parliament.

• (1535)

I had very good discussions with former Speaker Milliken a number of times and he always impressed me with his complete grasp and knowledge of parliamentary procedures, procedures that he defended to the hilt.

I will quote what Peter Milliken said in 1994 about omnibus bills. When the debate was ensuing in 1994, Mr. Milliken said:

The issues are exactly the same as those raised by the minister in his budget address.... I do not think there is anything unusual about lumping these together for the purposes of debate. The hon. member suggests they are totally disjointed and I suggest they are not. They are part of the overall economic plan of the government as announced in the budget.

That quote was referring to an omnibus bill brought forward by the then Liberal government which brought together a number of pieces of legislation under one bill. However, all of the items brought forward in that omnibus bill had been items that were discussed and proposed in the Liberal budget that was tabled several months prior.

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I would suggest that there is no difference between what happened in 1994 and the argument that Mr. Milliken raised and what is happening now. It has been proven to be procedurally in order for any government, regardless of political affiliation, to bring forward omnibus bills in this fashion. In fact, I would argue that it is the absolute right and prerogative of governments to bring forward legislation in whatever form they think is proper. That is what we have done. There can be no question that, from a procedural standpoint, we have followed the proper procedure in bringing forward the omnibus bill that we saw in the last session of Parliament.

I do not know what will happen in the future. I do not have a crystal ball. I have not seen the next budget implementation act, which, I am sure, will be introduced in due course, but even if that bill is considered to be omnibus, as was the previous BIA, it will be procedurally in order.

I understand that members of the opposition may not like it. They may feel that it does not give them an opportunity to fully debate pieces of legislation contained under the omnibus bill. However, I would point out that, in my opinion, the purpose and the objective of the opposition parties is not to debate legislation but rather to delay and obstruct legislation. I understand that. I understand the role of opposition members far more so perhaps than some of my newer colleagues to this place. I understand that they believe their purpose in this place is to try to delay and obstruct all government legislation because they are in opposition.

I give them full credit for trying to do what they can but it seems to be somewhat disingenuous, to say the least, to then stand up in this place, as they have done frequently, and say that they want to work with the government to better improve pieces of legislation, to hone and craft legislation that would be palatable to all Canadians.

I will point out that we have been back roughly a month in this fall session of Parliament and we have actually passed one piece of government legislation through the second reading stage. Why? It is because the opposition parties do not want to see legislation passed quickly. They want to delay and obstruct our government's economic plan as much as they possibly can because it would benefit them politically.

I understand all of that. That is the way this place works. The opposition parties are not unique in using that tactic. All opposition parties over time have done exactly the same thing. However, it is because of those actions that governments feel compelled from time to time to bring forward omnibus bills.

• (1540)

This government is no different. We have a plan that was outlined quite clearly in budget 2012. Our economic plan is to create jobs, continue to grow the economy and to ensure the long-term prosperity of the economy and of all Canadians. However, at all turns we find vehement and vociferous opposition from members in this place.

I hear a common cry from members opposite saying that they need more time to debate, that they want to debate the bill because Canadians want to know more about the legislation. I would point out to members in this place that when we introduced budget 2012 and then the budget implementation act that followed, there were

well over 200 speakers who stood to discuss and debate the budget we brought forward. I do not know what the opposition feels is adequate in terms of the time of debate, but most Canadians believe that having over 200 members of Parliament stand to make comments and, in some cases, pass judgment on our budget is more than adequate. Did that satisfy members of the opposition? Of course not.

As I said earlier, the opposition parties' objective is not to fully debate and discuss legislation. Their objective is to delay and obstruct legislation. That is something, as responsible government, we certainly do not abide by. We know that Canadians elected us for one primary reason. They felt that our government, our party and our Prime Minister were best suited to deal with difficult economic times.

Ever since the worldwide recession hit in 2009, Canada has been punching well above its weight in terms of economic performance. There is one reason for that. It is because of our government's handling of the economy. We are the envy of the industrialized world when it comes to the economic performance of our country and it is because of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the initiatives brought forward by our government that we have that reputation which is unparalleled in the world today. Every country in the industrialized world would trade places with Canada willingly if they only had that chance.

We are envied and admired by countries around the world because of our economic performance. When we bring forward budgets, and subsequently budget implementation acts, we are doing so to continue the economic performance that we have proven.

However, the opposition members do not wish to see Canada's economic performance enhanced. They truly do not want to see Canada continue on its economic progress path. Why? It is because it does not suit their political agenda. They would rather see our government fail miserably in terms of economics and economic performance because then and only then would they be able to go to the Canadian people and say that it is time for a change and we need a new caretaker or curator for the Canadian economy.

That is the reason for this motion today from the Liberal Party. It is trying to use this motion as yet another feeble attempt to embarrass the government and to try, in some small way, to make some political points by bringing forward close to a 20-year-old quote to convince Canadians that there is a need to change the way in which this Parliament deals with omnibus legislation. It is a sad commentary on the Liberal Party of today.

The reality is that we will continue to work on behalf of all Canadians. We will continue to bring forward legislation that strengthens the Canadian economy and strengthens Canada's ability to lead the world in terms of economic performance.

Business of Supply

• (1545)

I should also take this time to contrast from an economic standpoint some of the policies of the parties opposite, because that is what Canadians really want to know. Where is the choice? Canadians made their choice in the 2011 election by electing a majority Conservative government, primarily because they were confident in our ability to provide good economic stewardship. However, let us just imagine for a moment what kind of economic policies we would see if the official opposition were in power.

There is one thing that we have consistently stated over the past number of weeks. Here I start hearing the caterwauling and complaining opposite when I begin to talk about the NDP plan to impose a carbon tax. I see the smiles of some of my colleagues on the opposition benches right now. Therefore, I would point out to those Canadians who are watching a common political tactic that all parties use when they are being rightfully criticized. Their tactic is to laugh and to be dismissive, to imply that what one is saying makes no sense and does not really ring true. That is what the New Democrats do every time we bring forward the fact that in their 2011 election platform they stated in writing, in black and white, that they would impose a cap and trade program that would cost Canadian taxpayers \$21.5 billion.

To repeat, in their 2011 election platform, the New Democrats proposed a cap and trade program that would generate \$21.5 billion in revenues. Over the past number of weeks, we have heard the NDP members consistently say they do not have a policy or plan for a carbon tax, that the Conservatives are lying. I only point out what we know to be true. The fact is that the NDP called for a \$21.5 billion tax on consumers in its 2011 election platform.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is rising on a point of order.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I regret to raise this, but I am grievously concerned that a motion dealing with parliamentary practice and procedure around omnibus legislation has been reduced once again to the level of irrelevant debate.

Goodness, as leader of the Green Party, I think any discussion of the climate crisis is relevant. However, it is not relevant to accuse the NDP of having a carbon tax in the context of the motion before us.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, the member made an earlier intervention this morning, which was ruled upon and latitude was given to us to continue, and so I will continue with my comments.

My question for the NDP is simply this.

The Deputy Speaker: The parliamentary secretary has the right to go ahead. It is a bit of a stretch, but obviously most of the time that has been used has been directly related to the topic before us. Go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I will go back to the actual motion again, but to complete my thoughts I will ask members of the NDP this question.

The New Democrats say they are not supportive of a carbon tax and that in fact they did not purport to be in favour of a carbon tax in the 2011 election campaign. If generating \$21.5 billion in revenues from Canadian taxpayers is not a tax, then what is it? We have not heard any member of the NDP stand and give an answer to that very

simple question. If generating \$21.5 billion through a cap and trade program is not a tax, then what is it?

Back to the motion again, I will reiterate a couple of points that I made in my earlier intervention. The Liberal Party had an opportunity to bring forward something of substance today, such as new policy ideas or initiatives. God knows, but the Liberals should probably be trying to do that since they will soon be entering a leadership race and will be trying to convince Canadians they are worthy of their support come the next election. Therefore, one would think the Liberals would want to bring forward something that is substantive in nature, but instead we get this feeble political posturing. Quite frankly, that is beneath any political party, let alone the Liberal Party of Canada.

• (1550)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three questions, not 72 but only three.

I would first ask my colleague if he does not see any difference between a bill of 21 pages dealing with budgetary issues, which Mr. Milliken spoke about at that time, and the budget bill this year of more than 400 pages amending 72 laws. Is there no difference in his mind between those?

Second, there is no rush to change old age security eligibility to age 67. My colleague may think it is an important thing to do. I think it is a mistake. Why did we not have the time to debate this in a specific bill dealing with this issue? Is it because it would be embarrassing for the government to tell Canadians that it was doing that when it never said in the last election that it would do so?

Finally, I would like his advice on the next mammoth omnibus bill. If there is something in it that would decrease my pension, I would agree with that part of the bill because it would be good to make a sacrifice for Canadians. However, what am I supposed to do if I disagree with the other measures in this big omnibus bill? What are members supposed to do when they think that provision A is good in a mammoth bill, but provisions B through Z are bad?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that my hon. friend was not listening when I made my intervention. I pointed out on several occasions that the practice of introducing omnibus bills, regardless of size, has been ruled on by various Speakers as procedurally in order. I would invite my hon. colleague to go back to *Hansard* over the last three or four decades to find those rulings by the Speakers. They are in order. All Speakers have said that as long as there is a common thread among the pieces of legislation brought forward under the umbrella of an omnibus bill, in this case that of economic performance and economic generation, there is nothing wrong with any government bringing forward an omnibus bill.

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I am glad he asked why we are not debating changes to the old age security program. I would love to do that. I thought that perhaps today, it being the last day for a Liberal opposition motion, the Liberals would debate that for an entire day in Parliament. Did they? No, they did not. They brought forward a 20-year old quote and tried to embarrass the government. Rather than bringing forward substantive issues for sincere debate and discussion in this place, they chose to avoid that. They chose to make some inane political posture, an excuse to try to embarrass the government instead of a legitimate policy debate. Shame on the Liberals.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government keeps on steamrolling democracy by not allowing debate on the real issues. Instead of looking at issues one by one, we are steamrolled and Canadians are not benefiting from a full debate on matters. The government keeps throwing out untruths and half-truths and a series of questionable statements that tend to misdirect the Canadian population.

Here I would quote Don Martin from September 18, in an article entitled "Truth dies when political warfare begins", in which he stated:

Conservative stormtroopers have rolled out a welcome mat of sensational untruths.

There are enough cheap shots, personal swipes and fertilized lines of fact in the partisan parliamentary arsenal without unleashing outright fabrications to spread fear where it doesn't exist....

[W]hen political warfare turns bloody, truth becomes the first casualty and lies live on in the public record.

When will the government stop treating Canadians with such disrespect and actually have a serious debate in the House on the real issues that matter to Canadians?

● (1555)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, let us make one thing clear: the member opposite is quoting an editorial writer, a columnist, an opinion-seeker. I quote from his party's platform. It is all right for Don Martin or any other columnist for that matter to give an opinion, but it is not fact, simply an opinion. I am quoting facts.

In its 2011 election campaign platform, the NDP said that the cap and trade program it would implement if it were elected would generate \$21.5 billion in revenue. That is a tax. If we want to talk about half-truths and mistruths, the NDP members say they are not planning on bringing forward a carbon tax when their own election platform says they are. If someone wants to stand up here and correct the record, it should be the member opposite, not this government.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is an experienced parliamentarian and has been here for a while in opposition and government. What does he feel about how the opposition has been pursuing the government? I was really struck by his comments that the NDP would rather see Canadians hurt by bad economics than see us succeed as a nation working together, because the former would be in their partisan interests. That is of concern. I wonder if the member could expand on that.

He also asked us to imagine what an NDP government would look like. That takes me to a very dark place. I know it will probably never happen but I wonder if he could just help me imagine what kind of country that would be.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, to answer the first question by the Minister of State for Transport, all opposition parties, regardless of political affiliation, from time to time use tactics to try to delay the legislation of the government of the day. That is just what they do. That is why they are in opposition. They believe that is the role of opposition. Most Canadians would disagree with that type of approach. However, all governments and all opposition parties have engaged in that sort of dance over decades. It is unfortunate. It should not happen. All parties should attempt to try to craft legislation that would work for the betterment of the Canadian people.

What is most disturbing to me is the rhetoric that we hear primarily from the official opposition, the NDP. That party continues to say that it wants to work with the government but it does not. Those members have proven that. All they want to do is to obstruct and delay. I gave an example. In this parliamentary session one piece of legislation has passed second reading and gone to committee. We have been here for a month and only one piece of legislation has passed second reading. The opposition keeps saying collectively that we have a majority and can pass legislation when we want, so let us just debate it. Tactically, procedurally that is not quite true: the opposition can use tactics and procedural processes to delay government legislation.

With respect to my hon. colleague's last question about trying to envision what this country would be like if there were ever an NDP government, all I can say is that Halloween is coming and even in one's worst nightmare I do not think I could find a scarier sight than an NDP government, regardless of what kind of costumes those members wear.

● (1600)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my very distinguished colleague, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

I could not help but listen to the comments of the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, giving us advice as to which motions we should actually be drafting for discussion in opposition day motions and which other ones would be better than the one we are putting forward. He believes this is such a trivial technical subject that no one could possibly be interested in it.

In fact, the Canadian public is very interested in it. It is interested when a majority government systematically abuses its power and takes a decision of 20 years ago to use as justification for having a 450 page piece of legislation that we have to swallow whole, forcing the House to vote on amendment after amendment, moving closure after closure and making a farce of ministerial accountability. It put pensions in with environmental legislation, with all kinds of other measures that were added into the bill, then it realized in its own administration that it had to amend the law because it had made mistakes because the bill was so mammoth in terms of what it represented.

Business of Supply

Therefore, the notion that this is somehow a technical question, a tiny issue with respect to how Parliament operates, is completely false.

Also is the Conservatives' adulation of various Speakers' decisions of the past. The House is master of its own regulations, of its own rules and every Speaker has an obligation to be the defender of the rules of Parliament. However, it is up to Parliament to change its rules when it sees the way the rules are abused by the government of the day. The House needs to change its Standing Orders so members are able to do their jobs, so we are able to hold the government accountable and so we are able, as a Parliament, to do what our constituents expect us to do.

[*Translation*]

This government loves to tell us that we voted against the measures in Bill S-3, against employment measures and against important government investments.

When the Prime Minister was in the opposition, he said the same things and asked why that was the case and why it was difficult. When so many elements are included in a single measure, the opposition has no choice but to vote against it.

That is why the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville clearly said that we were prepared for changes to the MP pension plan. We have no problem with that. However, we must insist that, as members of Parliament, we have the right to vote on a measure that changes legislation. But the government's mindset and actions do not allow for that.

[*English*]

The government has taken a tiny exceptional provision, in which governments for purposes of consolidating a discussion on issues that came together but which in fact affected different legislation, which is one thing, to justify wholesale changes to every piece of legislation in the name of saying that it is all part of its economic action plan.

This is the triumph of propaganda over truth. This is the triumph of twisting words and interpretations to justify the unjustifiable. That is why Parliament has no choice but to debate this question. Yes, of course we are going to debate it in a way that demonstrates how two-faced the government is being. When it was in opposition it recognized the impossible position that these kinds of bills could put members of the opposition into. We were asked to consider not one piece of legislation that dealt with one particular matter, but an entire book of laws and amendments and changes that flowed from the overall economic plan of the government. It in fact demolished environmental regulation, changed entirely rules with respect to how many aspects of government legislation would work and brought it all together in the name of one simple, single matter.

•(1605)

This is what happens when governments abuse their power. When the Prime Minister was in opposition, he spoke up against what he saw as an abuse. Since he has become Prime Minister, he has taken zero action to limit the power of the executive in the ways in which he wanted to do. His government has attacked the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The Conservatives failed to listen to the Auditor General of Canada when he criticized their behaviour. The Prime

Minister has shown a singular lack of respect for the rule of law outside the purview of executive diktat. He forced the House last session to vote in favour of one bill which should have taken many different bills and the House to have serious discussion on all the matters that were put before us.

Now we know the son of omnibus is about to come before us. We wanted the House to have one opportunity to say to the government, "enough is enough". When the editorial writers of every major national newspaper and other commentators independent of Parliament say that parliamentary rights and privileges are being abused and that these are terrible practices in which to carry out accountability and transparency, we in this party are going to continue to push this point. If it means embarrassing the government by forcing Conservatives to swallow the words of their leader whole, fine, let them swallow the words and let them understand how two-faced their standards have become as they moved from opposition to government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for his very valid comments, and I assure him that he has my support for this motion.

There have been some preposterous instances, such as when the members opposite recently combined laws dealing with young offenders and laws dealing with pedophiles. But the ultimate was when fathers such as myself were told that we were siding with pedophiles. There is no need to explain how furious I was when I heard that.

I would like to hear what my hon. colleague has to say. How does this kind of conduct undermine people's respect for the work we do in the House?

I am even going to take a little jab at him: his own party introduced omnibus bills in the past. Why the about-face?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, first, I must say that we now have the opportunity to change the Standing Orders of this House.

We are suggesting changes because, as I said earlier, there is a difference. When there is a theme or a single objective that affects many laws, then an omnibus bill can be introduced. Is that not different from the situation that occurred in the spring? I would like to make it clear to the hon. member that, in my opinion, there is a difference.

We should have continued to discuss the issue, but the government turned down any opportunity to hold this candid and clear discussion. In committee, the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie proposed amendments and studies in order to discuss ways of accomplishing this goal. Unfortunately, since the Conservatives have a majority, they were not prepared to agree to that.

The second problem is that this gives the government the opportunity to attack members who vote against a measure because it is part of the legislation introduced by the government. However, the bill cannot be divided to show how different our opinions are.

Business of Supply

Interestingly enough, the hon. member for Calgary Southwest said exactly the same thing when he was a member of the opposition. He said that it was not fair to insist that members take a position on a comprehensive measure, an omnibus bill, without having the opportunity to voice their opinions on the aspects of the bill with which they agreed.

What the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville clearly stated was that we want to vote in favour of the measures proposed by the government some but not all of the time. However, the government puts us in a difficult position. The Conservatives do this for political, partisan and propaganda reasons.

•(1610)

[English]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the omnibus bill was introduced, 625 Canadian scientists and scientists from all over the world protested the government's use of a budget bill to amend the Fisheries Act. Does that not say something when 625 scientists get involved on a budget bill? Does that not tell us that maybe the bill was not just about the budget?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, we have reached the point now where, if the government continues in the way it is going, at the beginning of a session, it may introduce one bill, one law, one big fat bill on every conceivable subject and tell members to go ahead and discuss it.

One of the great members of the House, Stanley Knowles, the member for Winnipeg North Centre when I was first elected to the House, pointed this out to the government 20 years ago. He said that we had to understand the implication of what was taking place.

Now we are seeing it go from a 20-page omnibus bill to a 500 to 600-page omnibus bill. Surely at some point the thread is lost and what we have is something that we can all recognize and identify when we see it: the abuse of power. That is what we are seeing.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition motion urges us to put an end to the abusive and unprecedented use of omnibus legislation. It is a fact that bills to implement certain provisions of the budget have ballooned in size. They have grown at a spectacular rate since the Conservative government came to power.

[English]

A *Maclean's* analysis on budget implementation bills found that between 1994 and 2005, these bills averaged the length of just under 75 pages. However, from 2006 to today, they have averaged well over 300 pages.

[Translation]

And, as we know, this year, Bill C-38 was 452 pages long. However, it is not just the length of the bills that is in question; it is also the number of unrelated topics that are being crammed into one bill. Back in budget 2010, the government used the same scheme to amend no fewer than 24 laws, but this time, the government is smashing its own record. Bill C-38 amended no fewer than 72 laws. In almost every case, these amendments had little to do with the budget or any financial issues in general.

The government defends itself by saying that it has to act quickly because of the worrisome economic conditions. This argument would be more credible if the 452 pages of Bill C-38 actually had anything to do with fiscal measures. Such is not the case. Only 30 pages had anything to do with fiscal measures. In fact, no fewer than 151 pages amended laws concerning the protection of the environment.

The Standing Committee on Finance had to review a mishmash of issues as crucial as the weakening of many environmental laws and regulations, the end of protecting fish habit, the power given to the government to reverse decisions by the National Energy Board, the weakening of the Food and Drugs Act, the gradual change in the age of eligibility for old age security benefits to 67, the cancellation of thousands of immigration applications, the weakening of the Governor General's mandate, and so on.

•(1615)

[English]

Now the government plans to restart this fall with a new omnibus bill that would go in all directions. Some likely topics would be pension changes for public servants, pension changes for parliamentarians, a new mandate for the National Research Council and new oil tanker regulations. The Minister of Natural Resources repeatedly said that these changes were somewhere in Bill C-38, but no one was able to find them. It would also likely include the Rouge Valley national urban park and the renewal of the hiring credit for small business and so forth.

[Translation]

This is how the Conservative government transformed budget implementation bills into a steamroller that allows it to push through important measures that deserve a thorough review, without any serious, careful examination. Today's motion urges us to put an end to this suspect way of doing things, which is dangerous to the health and safety of Canadians.

Is it not as though there is no solution to this problem. In a recent communication, professor Louis Massicotte looked more closely at the practice in the United States.

[English]

He found a list of 42 U.S. states that have provisions that prohibit omnibus bills. For example, the Arkansas constitution states:

The general appropriation bill shall embrace nothing but appropriations for the ordinary expense of the executive, legislative and judicial departments of the State; all other appropriations shall be made by separate bills, each embracing but one subject.

I am not sure we need to go as far as that. I am just saying that it is possible, if we have goodwill, to find solutions to the problem we are facing today.

Professor Massicotte notes that on January 23, 2012, representative Tom Marino, a Republican from Pennsylvania, introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives, the One Subject at a Time Act that goes to "end the practice of including more than one subject in a single bill".

Business of Supply

[Translation]

I repeat that, with good will, we could put an end to this contempt for parliamentary democracy, which is being criticized by Canadians everywhere.

[English]

For example, Professor Ned Frank said:

These omnibus budget implementation bills subvert and evade the normal principles of parliamentary review of legislation.

[Translation]

However, the most sincere criticism comes from one of our colleagues opposite, who was at the time, and remains to this day, the member for Calgary Southwest, the current Prime Minister. On March 25, 1994—as we have heard repeatedly here today—regarding a budget bill that was only 21 pages long and included only measures that were clearly budget related, that member said the following in this House:

...I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.

So why is the Prime Minister now putting us in a clear conflict with our own principles? Again quoting the Prime Minister:

...In the interest of democracy, I ask: How can members represent their constituents...when they are forced to vote in a block...?

...Dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill.

So, in the interest of democracy, why will the Prime Minister not divide his gigantic bill? He went on to say:

...only one committee...will inevitably lack the breadth of expertise required for consideration of a bill of this scope.

Why does the Prime Minister no longer feel the need to call on several committees instead of just one? If he will not listen to anyone else, the Prime Minister should at least take his own advice in the interest of democracy and simple common sense, so that we as legislators can do our job in service to Canadians.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this Liberal motion.

• (1620)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech and his party for bringing this matter forward.

I note that the member noted the speech by the then member for Calgary Southwest, now the Prime Minister of this country. If I could just reiterate, the Prime Minister at that time said that the omnibus bill, which was a little over 20 pages, was of a matter so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles. He further said:

...in the interest of democracy I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

I would ask the hon. member, who has been in this House for some time, if he recalls the mantra of the Reform Party, which was open, transparent, participatory democracy?

I noted earlier that one of the members of the Conservative Party opposite said, well, Canadians voted for them, so essentially they should be able to do whatever they want.

They have taken the “progressive” out of the Conservative Party. Perhaps it should be the regressive Conservative Party. They no longer believe in participatory democracy.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite and all my colleagues, I would suggest they look at the contents of Bill C-17 in 1994.

It set the salaries of public servants, judges and parliamentarians. It set the new limit for the Canada Assistance Plan. It adjusted Ottawa's payments to railways. It allowed the CBC to borrow money as a crown corporation. It made some changes to employment insurance.

Arguably, some may say it should have been split. That is what the Prime Minister was saying at that time, and the Speaker ruled in favour of the government. I think it was a fair argument.

Today, with 450 pages, 72 bills, we are in another world. It is complete nonsense to pretend the government is doing it only because of the economic difficulties of our time. There were also difficulties in 1994.

I fail to understand why there was a rush to impose on all Canadians the age of 67 for old age benefit eligibility, and why it was decided now without a specific bill for this very important issue.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not so long ago, the government gave a speech about the omnibus bill that we will support, a speech about the carbon tax. That has nothing to do with today's debate.

An omnibus bill is a catch-all that allows the government to deal with a number of issues at the same time. Often, we cannot morally support them. That is why we often vote against an omnibus bill. It is sometimes disgraceful, and we cannot move forward.

Does the member believe that introducing an omnibus bill is another means of reducing the amount of time members have to speak in order to represent their constituents and to voice their opinions on matters of importance in their daily lives, such as old age security or the environment?

• (1625)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the government wanted to introduce many measures, some of which are not popular, so it decided to bury them in a budget in order to avoid or at least limit controversy. That is the reason.

Let us go back to the very scandalous decision to increase the eligibility age for federal benefits to 67, something the government never mentioned during the election campaign. The government knows that this is a very unpopular measure, but it wants to implement this measure without Canadians noticing. So, it buried this measure in a huge budget and made sure that we would not have time to discuss it, and that this very serious issue would not be covered by a specific bill.

Business of Supply

If the government believes that it is making such a good decision, why is it afraid to openly debate this?

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Pursuant to Standing Order 38, I must inform the House of the matters it will be addressing at the time of adjournment this evening: the hon. member for Churchill, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Ahuntsic, Justice; the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Employment.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Hamilton-Centre.

We are here to debate the democratic validity of so-called omnibus bills. The term is already an old one. Many important omnibus bills have been introduced in the House over the years, as a quick search of Hansard will show. There are numerous precedents. What that search also shows is that, on every occasion, the opposition reacted as though it had been programmed in 1867 to repeat the same thing every time: omnibus bills are undemocratic.

They all claim their rights are being violated. All of them have said it over and over and over again. All of them. The Reform Party said it through the current Prime Minister, the former Progressive Conservative Party said it as well, and, it goes without saying, the Liberals have sung it in every possible octave many, many times.

In 150 years of parliamentary activity, people have expressed indignation, but no one has ever made a genuine attempt to block omnibus bills. That is why we still have them. Omnibus bills are designed, drafted, tabled and passed, and they become law.

As I noted in passing, everyone has expressed indignation. Everyone has accused the government of behaving unethically. They have also announced the death of democracy and appealed to parliamentarianism on moral grounds. Great!

The result is that life goes on; the country votes, voters punish or reward, and a new omnibus bill is ultimately introduced. And the whole rigmarole starts again.

Let us call that the march of history, or legislative bad habits, as you will, except that sometimes surprising and unpredictable consequences arise even here, in Ottawa, on what is generally rather quiet Anishnabe land.

True to their beloved excess, inspired by the tyrants of the Old Testament, the Conservatives have not skimped on the *omnes reibus sub sole, orbi et urbi*, all things under the sun, in the earthly city and the heavenly city.

Bill C-38, the budget implementation act, which was tabled in the spring and which I have previously discussed in the House, ran to 421 pages, contained 753 provisions and amended a series of more or less related acts.

I compared reading Bill C-38 to reading *War and Peace*. I apologize because I strongly recommend *War and Peace* to everyone. However, neo-conservative-style omnibus bills inspired solely by a raging desire to shift everything to the right without listening to or understanding anything do not make for good reading. I want to warn my colleagues because a second budget bill will of course be tabled shortly.

This time, however, we can see the theatrics coming. This document will have no fewer than 800 pages. It will be heavier than the Code of Hammurabi itself and no doubt just as modern. And why not? From now on, there will be an upward spiral. The next one may have 1,000 pages, the following 2,000 pages, and we will no doubt wind up with omnibus bills of 5,000 pages written in Sumerian cuneiform hieroglyphics on granite tablets. Dead languages are all the rage, so why not?

Of course, no consideration is given to the Canadian people in those 800 pages. They may wonder what motivates the Conservatives to act like this. It is very simple. As in everything they undertake, they are deeply convinced that they are taking action to restore Canadian society, which was languishing in perdition.

Have they asked any questions to challenge their ideas? Of course not. When you believe you have a mission, you only talk to people who tell you what you want to hear.

Knowing that they have only one majority mandate and that their days as a government are numbered, they are rushing to change things they do not like. And by “things”, I mean “everything”.

After all, the world could end next week. How will we look to St. Peter if the country is too concerned about people who do not deserve that concern? Success at any price: that is the measure of salvation.

This could be characterized as an typically medieval attitude, but that would be to overlook the fact that Europe's cathedrals were built during the Middle Ages. Apart from vandalizing and renaming museums built by others, however, the Conservatives are not doing much.

What am I getting at with all these comparisons? I am simply saying that what took 150 years to build cannot be changed in four years.

Whoever thinks that is simply a despot. However, 800-page omnibus bills are outward signs of that kind of folly.

The citizens of this country feel there is a problem with changing 1,000 acts in one fell swoop.

When we ask why, we are told that we should ask no questions and that if we object, that means we want to condemn Canada to misery.

When we resist, someone on the other side rises and unleashes a whole string of epithets: communist, separatist, terrorist or Esperantist.

Once they have calmed down, the Conservatives tell us they are doing this out of diligence. However, that is false, and everyone knows it. They are not really acting this way for my good or that of Canadians.

No, they are doing it first and foremost for their friends, the big corporations, for the cash, and to transform Canada's economy into a profit-making machine, without any scruples or long-term vision.

Business of Supply

•(1630)

If you are too big a slouch to get close to the sources of prosperity, the government can do nothing for you. You can eat your shirt. But let us take a look at what we can do today to try to solve this problem.

First, I would like to put things in perspective. The gigantic omnibus bills rushed through the Standing Committee on Finance appear to be a Conservative affectation that will surely not survive them. Consequently, I will not be one of those people announcing the death of democracy. The Westminster system is built too solidly for a single government to do enough to cause it irreparable damage.

It is also obvious that no one will ever question whether the NDP, when it comes to power, will at any time act as the Conservatives are doing. We do not feel we have a mission inspired by apocalyptic revelations, and Canadians know that. We also believe in dialogue and in compromise and fairness, but we especially trust in the intelligence of Canadians. To the NDP, the Conservatives' at-any-cost attitude is above all an obvious sign of weakness.

The Conservatives are going to keep introducing 30-pound paving stones in this House and saying, "Out of the way, coming through." If the block falls on somebody's head, they will not even slow down. Certainly, I will keep objecting to these kinds of crude political manoeuvres, but I can also wait them out. I will be watching and waiting, because I know this is a dangerous game. I know Canadians see what is going on and will not put up with being toyed with for very long. The public knows very well that these omnibus bills conceal low blows and schemes. There is a very real risk that the Conservatives' world will end in 2015. I will not have made them get out their Latin textbooks for nothing. *Oro pro vobis*—I am praying for you.

The Liberals' solution is to use the opportunity they have today to give the impression they are doing something. They really have no other choice, stuck away as they are at the back of the House by the broom closet and the fuse box. I will give them the benefit of the doubt. They are also shocked by the legislative gall of the government, and they too want to cool its autocratic jets.

The NDP therefore has no problem supporting the motion by the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie. It will be beneficial to the conduct of parliamentary proceedings to find a way to stave off any future paving stones. And what a good opportunity, when the NDP is the official opposition and can make sure the review process is carried out with the public interest in mind.

I have no illusions, however. The Liberals are so full of a sense of self-entitlement that they are only angry because they have been outwitted by people who are stronger and bolder than them. Their indignation today is out of self-interest only. They will be happy to cite the legal precedent of the Conservatives' 800-page omnibus bills, but as soon as they get a bit of power, it will be their great pleasure to mimic their old enemy. This motion, which seems to reflect a new-found awareness, is of course no more than the never-ending squabbling between the Liberals and the Conservatives. The sole purpose of this schoolyard quarrel is to select and crown the one that excels at enraging the other in the most underhanded way, at the expense, and to the tacit exclusion, of the Canadian public, of course.

The purpose of a Parliament is for us to talk, not just among ourselves, and not just so we can dig in our heels. It is, first and foremost, a place for dialogue with the experts who are invited to testify in committee, so that by hearing opposing opinions, parliamentarians can make informed decisions. Committees exist for that reason. A bill that amends all sorts of laws covering all different areas should not exist. Subjects and bills should be dealt with individually, so they can be examined in the proper committees. That is why we are here. We must not go on blind belief; we must understand and decide. If they do not agree with that really very simple premise, I can show them the way to North Korea.

It is crucially important that elected representatives have access to the most accurate information in order to legislate, but they must also have a minimum of intellectual curiosity, and that is unfortunately not always the case. That does not concern me excessively either, since the system is sufficiently well designed that even the biggest idiot could not do too much harm.

There is a big difference between an occasional idiot who does a bad job—and of course I am speaking hypothetically—and a party that decides in advance what is true and what is false. An 800-page omnibus bill is a case in point. It is a decree. It is a [*member spoke in a foreign language*], as I said last time. The czar decides and the subjects obey. All discussion is derided as a waste of time and a misplaced tendency to play the bleeding heart.

Today, we have a chance to send a message to the people who aspire to authoritarianism above all. It is plain to Canadians that decimating the machinery of government will not save them any money and will condemn them to living in a country where the guardrails have collapsed under the pressure, and Canadians will not forgive them for that.

•(1635)

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House to thank my colleague for the excellent speech she just made. It was lovely. I really liked the imagery she used. It is very refreshing to hear in the House, especially when we hear all kinds of demagogic comments from the other side of the House.

Where to start? I know that my colleague works hard on democratic reform and on everything to do with our parliamentary system. It is very important to her, and I know that she wants to do the right thing here. What would happen if we did not have omnibus bills? Would it attract and encourage the next generation of MPs to come work in the House? Would they find that more democratic?

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Alfred-Pellan for her question. She understands what the issues are here.

Omnibus bills are simply wrong. Parliament should never have to deal with this kind of thing. As I said, our role is to examine every bill, in light of what experts tell us about the bill and what it changes.

When we see that a bill dealing with employment insurance, the environment and the fishery is examined only by the Standing Committee on Finance, how can we prevent young people from becoming cynical about politics and this kind of thing?

Business of Supply

It is so contemptuous, so cynical, that many people certainly become disheartened about politics.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that this motion is truly against the Conservatives.

[English]

Imagine being a Conservative backbencher. Is it such a bad thing to reform the House's practices so that Conservative backbenchers can actually go home and say what they voted for or voted against and why it is in people's interests that they did what they did? It actually makes a lot of sense for Conservative backbenchers to want to reform the House's rules so that the government does not stuff everything into one omnibus bill.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Kingston and the Islands for the question. He is also a very hard-working member and I really appreciate his efforts. He is quite right. I am sure that many Conservative members would fully support this motion if they could vote according to their conscience. Of course they see what is happening and they tell themselves that they too were elected to represent their constituents and to pass legislation.

Will we ever see a day when the government could prorogue Parliament after introducing a bill that is 5,000 pages long and contains everything it wants to do over the next four years? Such a government might think "no problem; we do not need anything else; this has passed; it is a done deal and we have done our job as parliamentarians".

Of course that is completely ridiculous and this could take us there. So, I rather agree with my colleague that many Conservative members probably agree with the motion.

• (1640)

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. In her speech she spoke about trusting Canadians.

Could she talk about whether Canadians can trust a government and a Prime Minister who, a few years ago, said that an omnibus bill was an abuse of Parliament and is now saying the opposite?

How can we trust a Prime Minister who tells Canadians one thing and then does the opposite in this House?

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, it is very obvious. We cannot trust these types of comments when they are contradicted afterwards, especially since the Liberal omnibus bill that the Prime Minister complained about was only 21 pages long. It was an omnibus bill, but we all agree that it was not really comparable to a 400- or 800-page omnibus bill. Therefore it is a particularly hypocritical remark.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. I will begin by adding my voice to those who have complimented our colleague, the deputy critic for democratic reform, for doing an awesome job on a very complex file.

I will make reference to an article in *The Globe and Mail* that reads:

A dramatic confrontation in the Ontario Legislature ended yesterday in a major victory for the opposition parties and forced the Progressive Conservatives to agree to extensive public hearings on the government's sweeping omnibus legislation.

The victory occurred after an unusual standoff in which veteran Liberal MPP Alvin Curling delayed debate on the bill for 18 hours by refusing to leave the chamber when ordered to do so for violating parliamentary rules. Attempts to use force to remove Mr. Curling were thwarted by opposition politicians who blocked approaches to his desk and stayed all night to prevent authorities from reaching him.

The protest, an almost unprecedented act of civil disobedience for a politician, was undertaken by Liberals and New Democrats to force province-wide hearings next month on the omnibus legislation, known officially by its numerical title as Bill 26, the Savings and Restructuring Act.

For those Canadians who live in our most populous province, they will probably remember that bill number because it was a major issue. I want to point out that the date on that article in *The Globe and Mail* by Mr. Martin Mittelstaedt was December 8, 1995.

I raise that for a number of reasons. Obviously, it ties into the motion before us, but when it states, "Attempts to use force to remove Mr. Curling were thwarted by opposition politicians who blocked approaches to his desk", I was one of those politicians who was thwarting. I consider it a highlight and certainly one of the most memorable times.

The other reason I mention that and the reason that it is relevant is not just that it was the Conservatives' provincial cousins, other than a minor name change, but what is really interesting, and we never know how history will unfold, is that today I find myself sitting right across from three former colleagues of the Ontario legislature who now sit as senior members of the Prime Minister's cabinet. They were applauded back in that day too because they were also on the front bench of then premier Mike Harris's government that brought in bill 26.

Do I hear that caucus now saying that bill 26, as it was brought in originally without hearings, was the right thing to do? It just went kind of quiet because they only want to heckle the parts that they like. They should stay because we can have lots of fun on this. They should be a part of this.

The members talked about history. We have seen history repeat itself. Lo and behold, here we are today and those three senior cabinet ministers who were part of bill 26, the omnibus bill that they tried to ram through the Ontario legislature back in 1995, are here today in 2012, having rammed through one bill and getting ready to ram through another omnibus bill. It was unacceptable then and it is damn well unacceptable today.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Business of Supply

●(1645)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I understand the passion of the speaker but the use of that term is unparliamentary and not allowed in this chamber.

Mr. David Christopherson: I was wrong, Mr. Speaker, and you have probably done me a favour because I would have heard from my mom anyway. I apologize to both you and the only higher authority I would acknowledge on the planet, which would be my mom. I have to stop doing that. There is another word I use that I think is okay and it not okay. I stand corrected.

What is interesting and more troubling is that the government managed to get re-elected. This time Conservatives learned not to cheer quite so loud because there may be a part B, which there is. Because that kind of agenda of omnibus bills trampling on democratic rights, trampling on democratic traditions, those things matter to Canadians. Remember who we are. We are a people who pride ourselves on fairness, inclusiveness, justice and democracy in the fullness of the word.

That agenda over time gave them a second majority government, but it also led to their red tape commission where they would roll back protective regulations, which is by the way exactly what the Conservatives brought here federally. The reason they are not hooting and hollering right now is because that blind attitude to an ideological bottom line led to Walkerton. Does anybody want to start laughing about that?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, somebody else seems to want to have the floor—

The Deputy Speaker: Again, I would admonish the member that his comments have to be made to the Chair, not to the people on the other side of the aisle.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, maybe I will just start referencing who is heckling.

We are talking about Walkerton and Ontarians died. There is nothing funny about that and I am not spinning it. I believe seven people died and the inquest showed that one of the reasons it happened was because of the regulations the government cut and because of money it cut in those departments. It was not the whole reason, I am not saying that, but the findings were that it played a role.

I am on my feet today to point out that some of us have seen this movie before. We watched what happened under Mike Harris, and his chief of staff until recently was also the chief of staff of the Prime Minister of Canada. Three of the senior ministers in that government are senior ministers in the current government.

The point is that all these things lead to the wrong conclusion for Canadians because it is only about blindly cutting. Whether it is cutting funding, cutting regulations, cutting entitlements, Conservatives are always cutting. The government is always cracking down. There is room for those things and they are part of governing too, but it seems to be the only note the government is able to play. Some of us have been around long enough—

●(1650)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, would you rule on whether or not the current conversation we are having is relevant at all to the motion before us. I would like him to stay on topic.

The Deputy Speaker: It is on topic. It is directly related to the motion that is before us.

Continuing, the member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, we stand up and call the Conservatives on it and they do everything they can to extinguish the discussion. They say we should not have that debate because it is upsetting them and their supporters. That is what they are trying to do. They are trying to muzzle as much democracy as they can. They do it through legislation, through their decisions in the House, through cutting and by standing up whenever they can and finding a guise under which they can shut down democracy. That is my whole point in raising this. We have been here before. There was wide criticism at the time for the government doing that. There is wide criticism now. Yes, it may work politically. They haven't paid the price yet—

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been listening intently to this debate all day and earlier today you made a ruling that speaking about the budget, which is of great importance to Canadians, was not relevant to this debate. I have listened to that member go on at length about something that was done in another legislature in the province of Ontario many years ago. He was making some kind of spurious allegation about how there is some connection between what was done in some bill in the Ontario legislature some years ago to something else that happened in the province of Ontario, which he knows is not true, and somehow that is relevant to the debate about process that the opposition wants to have today rather than talking about the things that Canadians really care about, which is jobs and economic opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I wish you could perhaps provide some further clarification on your ruling in connection with what we are listening to right now.

The Deputy Speaker: I will do so to this extent. The ruling this morning was with regard to the length of time that was being spent indirectly relating to the issue that was before the House. What we are hearing at this point is specifically related because the member is talking about omnibus bills, whether those are here in this legislature or in another legislature. It is clearly directly relevant.

The member for Hamilton Centre has about 45 seconds to complete his speech.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate members helping to underscore my point, because that is exactly what they did by responding that way.

Business of Supply

My point is that democracy in our country is being undermined. Scrutinizing budget bills is one of the most important things that opposition members do. It has been shown time and time again when that is not allowed to happen properly, democracy and Canadians lose.

My point here is that we need to bell this cat and acknowledge that the same things are happening again and they have to be stopped. The Conservatives talk a good democratic argument but they need to start walking the walk in terms of democracy. They need to provide the time required to study omnibus bills. They should not be so hypocritical about when they apply their thinking as to when there are omnibus bills and when there are not.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whenever the hon. member gets up and speaks he makes it quite clear why Canadians have never given the NDP a mandate to govern this country and why in the province of Ontario the NDP was only thankfully given one mandate and thrown out of office, never to come close to the halls of government ever again.

From 1990 through 1995 that member was a member of a government in the province of Ontario that prorogued the legislature after sitting for only 90 days. That government introduced a budget at a table. The finance minister at the time, Floyd Laughren, dropped the budget on a table at a press conference and that was the end of it. An election was called after that. That government sat for 90 days. I do not remember that hon. member's outrage at the fact that democracy, when he was in office, was thwarted and that Ontarians were only given 90 days.

Specifically on omnibus legislation, I recall that on the particular bill that the member has been referencing, the NDP brought forward 1,200 amendments. Who brought those amendments forward? Is the member saying that none of the members of the NDP actually read the bill and brought those 1,200 amendments forward? Who brought those amendments forward if it wasn't—?

• (1655)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I realize the member loves to attack and I am fine with receiving the attack, but I am not really sure what the attack was or what the question is at the end of the day.

It was an imperfect government, like all governments. Its problems were pointed out. I want to remind the member that for me that was six Parliaments ago. If he wants to talk to me about his record in six more Parliaments, I will be here waiting for him.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very passionately expressed concerns about what is happening with parliamentary democracy. I am so glad that he gave us that historical perspective about the kind of damage that can be done when we have omnibus bills that, instead of dealing with the budget, try to sneak in other pieces of legislation.

I want to draw this to the attention of the House and specifically ask my colleague a question. Buried in the bill was the deletion of close to 300,000 prospective Canadians who were playing by the rules set by our government. These were skilled workers,

professionals, who we said we wanted in our country and they were waiting in line. Buried in that bill was the deletion of all those applications. That is the reason that omnibus bills make no sense. They bury so much stuff in them.

What other kinds of things were buried in that bill that make it difficult for there to be such pieces of legislation?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, if we look at the issues that were contained in Bill C-26, there are lessons there too. That bill covered things like health care; pay equity; municipal affairs, which is arguably the biggest part of provincial business; public employee contracts; environmental laws; and freedom of information laws.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In the member's response to me he said my question was irrelevant because it was six parliaments ago. He is now referencing a bill in another legislature that was five parliaments ago. Clearly that is not relevant either. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to have him talk about something that is actually—

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

The member for Hamilton Centre has about 30 seconds left.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, what matters here are the subjects. What are the subjects? My colleague asked the question about burying things that look small but have big implications. The subject matters the government chooses are interesting. They are often in areas that have the greatest controversy and do the biggest harm to the majority of, in this case Ontarians, and here of course, Canadians.

The *Globe and Mail* editorial, on that same bill, said this:

To get out of this fix, the government may well need special tools. But democracy would be better served if we had a closer look inside the tool box.

That is all we are asking.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, people watching at home may want to turn up the volume. I do not think I can match the projection of the hon. member, though I hold as passionately to my views as he does. I respect the experience that he brings to this debate, having been a member of the Ontario legislature and having witnessed many legislative moments.

Speaking of legislative moments, I recall how the session of Parliament ended in June, with all night voting. I have been in the House for almost eight years. I had never experienced an all-night voting session. It was really something. We were part of history that day and night. In fact, I was not sure if people at home were paying attention to what was going on in the House or if they understood we had been voting for 24 hours. However, when I got home the next day, I ran into people who said that they could not believe I was there, that I was up and awake as I had been voting for 24 hours. Everyone knew about that episode.

That 24 hours of voting did more for our democracy than many of the speeches that have been given in the House, even the excellent speeches, like the one given by the hon. member before me. In some way it alerted Canadians to the fact that we were dealing with a government that was uncompromising.

Business of Supply

Canadians did elect a majority government, but they did not expect that the Canadian parliamentary tradition of compromise would just evaporate and go out the window. They expect the government to work with the opposition. In this regard, I remember seeing a video not too long ago. It was a video of the very first televised question period in the House of Commons. It was in 1977, October I believe. The prime minister at the time was Prime Minister Trudeau. We had a Progressive Conservative opposition, and Joe Clark was the leader of the opposition.

The very first question in the very first televised question period was quite riveting. I would invite my hon. colleagues to Google that question. The economy was top of mind back then, as it is today. I believe the Trudeau government was in the process of preparing a budget.

Mr. Clark got up, and he was quite eloquent, quite reasoned and quite forceful. He basically called on the government to do more, to present some kind of plan to would help combat unemployment. In fact, the problem at the time was stagflation. It was a stagnating economy combined with price inflation.

It was a tough and well-reasoned question. The prime minister got up very calmly, thanked Mr. Clark for his question and basically invited the opposition to make suggestions that could be incorporated in a financial plan or in a budget.

I found the tenor of that exchange much different from what we witness here every day. It was an invitation to compromise on the part of Mr. Trudeau even though he had a majority at the time. I think this is what Canadians want to see. They want to see compromise. They want to see parties working together.

When my constituents asked me about the all night voting, I told them it was because the government had stuffed everything imaginable into one piece of legislation, variously called a Trojan horse bill and a kitchen sink bill. They were not pleased. Nor were they amused. They started thinking about just what kind of government they had elected a year before.

Canadians want us to work together. How do we know that this was not just any kind of omnibus bill, that it was an especially flagrant kind of omnibus bill that was introduced and voted on in the spring session?

● (1700)

When Canadians hear the word “budget”, they think of a financial plan for the next year or maybe the next two or three years. However, what we voted on in the spring was not just a financial plan.

As I said before, 625 scientists wrote a letter to the Prime Minister to say that that he should not weaken the Fisheries Act using a budget bill to do so. The fact that 625 scientists, environmental scientists and biologists, wrote to the Prime Minister to ask him not to amend the Fisheries Act gives us an idea that maybe the budget bill was not just a financial plan, maybe it was much more.

Former fisheries ministers, Liberal and Progressive Conservative, also wrote the Prime Minister arguing against weakening the Fisheries Act and adding that they were very concerned about the process.

I will quote a letter from Thomas Siddon, a Progressive Conservative; David Anderson, a former Liberal fisheries minister; John Fraser, a former Progressive Conservative fisheries minister; and Herb Dhaliwal, a former Liberal fisheries minister. We have two from each party. They wrote, “We are especially alarmed about any possible diminution of the statutory protection of fish habitat”. They were saying basically the same thing as the 625 environmental scientists. They went on to say, “With respect to process, we find it troubling that the government is proposing to amend the Fisheries Act via omnibus budget legislation”.

Here we have former ministers, two Progressive Conservatives and two Liberals, coming together united in their opposition to the government's approach to democracy to say that this is not the way to revamp environmental legislation in this country.

We know we have a problem when the budget bill does much more than cut programs that should not be cut. Of course, we are upset that the government cut the world renowned Experimental Lakes Area program. Quite frankly, it is the greatest laboratory in the world for freshwater research. We are upset about that, but it was a budget decision. Any budget bill by a government intent on destroying water science would include that kind of measure.

One can understand a budget measure within a budget bill, but when a government starts amending the Fisheries Act and changing environmental assessments, it is way outside the realm of creating a narrow financial plan for Canada.

I know the Prime Minister is an economist. I studied economics as well. There is a term in economics called “money illusion”. If one has taken a macro economics course, one would know what that means. It is a situation where people are not aware of the impact that inflation is having on their real standard of living. When I think of the government's omnibus bill, I think of the fact that it is really creating smoke and mirrors. It is trying to hide certain facts from Canadians, certain changes to immigration policies and environmental policies. It is creating an illusion like the Wizard of Oz with lots of smoke and mirrors. We have a couple of people, maybe in the Prime Minister's Office, changing the face of the country. It reminds me of the concept of money illusion.

The government's approach also reminds of telecommunication companies that sell cellphone plans. The other day my wife and I were talking about what kind of plan we should get. She said that she called and that we could save so much a month, but I really did not believe it. It is all smoke and mirrors. We will save here but end up paying more there. These plans are so complex one just cannot understand them.

● (1705)

That is essentially what the government is doing with democracy. It is making legislation so broad, so complex, that is very hard even for hard-working parliamentarians to wrap their minds around the many aspects of omnibus legislation.

Business of Supply

Does it make any sense that changes to the Fisheries Act would be studied by the finance committee of the House of Commons? Does it make any sense that the experts, the financial experts, the great members of Parliament with all kinds of financial expertise on the finance committee are going to discuss, for a limited period of time, changes to one of the most complex pieces of environmental legislation in the country? No, it does not.

I sincerely hope the government understands that Canadians do not appreciate the smoke and mirrors, that they want a bit more democracy in this place, that they want a bit more compromise and that they are very serious about they want.

● (1710)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed very much serving on the environment and sustainable development committee with the hon. member. He is always very thoughtful in his analysis.

The hon. member mentioned a lot of the concern raised, not just by ordinary Canadians but also by former ministers of the Crown, about changes made in the omnibus bill and the deep concern about the lack of opportunity for discourse and to look at the pros and cons of those measures.

There has been some joviality in the House across the way about concerns that were raised about the lack of opportunity for the opposition to participate properly in the review of a major omnibus bill. I would like to suggest to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that the real harm is to Canadians.

As I mention before, one of the members across the way seemed to suggest that once a government was elected, then that was it for democracy, that it was elected and it could make whatever decisions it wanted. We have seen this reflected in its omnibus bills.

Does the member think that the feedback that was given to the last omnibus bill is representative of the fact Canadians are fed up and they want to go back to participatory democracy?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I neglected to mention in my speech that I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Sydney—Victoria.

Indeed, in an election campaign, many issues are discussed, parties have their platforms, but obviously not every conceivable issue that will come to the floor of the House of Commons after the election is brought up in a campaign.

In the last election campaign, I do not remember anyone talking about weakening the Fisheries Act. Maybe I missed it or maybe I was not following the news that day, but I never heard it.

It is incumbent upon a government, even if has a majority, when it introduces something that has not been debated in the context of an election campaign to show a bit more openness to debate and compromise.

I would agree with my hon. colleague that democracy is not a simple thing of going to the polls every four years, voting and then tabulating the results. Yes, that is extremely important. It is at the centre of our democracy.

However, people elect representatives to come to the capital, to this legislature, to further debate, to come up with new ideas, to challenge old ideas and to create good legislation, which is very complex and obviously is not always discussed during a campaign.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, think about what will come through the new omnibus bill and how much went through the last one. Think about how much legislation has gone through the House in the last 100 and some years and the work that has been done. All of a sudden, with one stroke of the pen, the Conservatives threw it all away with what happened in the last omnibus bill. We have seen what happened with the seniors and the seasonal workers.

When we go through omnibus bills like this, the impact it has on individuals across the country is immense. Would he comment on how wrong it is to put a bill like this through that would have such an impact on all the constituents we all represent without it really having seen the light of day?

● (1715)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. The bill affected refugees and impacted those who want to become Canadian citizens, and, as I said, the environment. Indeed, it impacted on many different segments of society. It impacted on tomorrow's seniors. By ramming the bill through in one piece in a short period of time, by definition, the government did not give an opportunity to the large number of people impacted by the bill to have their say.

What also worries me, and the member alluded to it, is that the government is changing our traditions and standards. It was shocking to have an omnibus bill of that size. Now that a precedent has been created, it might become a practice by the government and then people will start to think it is a normal part of the way democracy functions. However, it is not and we need to stand up to that kind of misuse of democracy.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

Business of Supply

●(1755)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 473)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Grogulé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Plamondon
Quach	Rae
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	St-Denis
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Stoffler
Sitsabaiesan	Toone
Stewart	Tumel
Sullivan	
Tremblay	
Valeriotte — 131	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
Payne	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shiple
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trotter
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 152

Government Orders

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

● (1800)

[English]

FASTER REMOVAL OF FOREIGN CRIMINALS ACT

The House resumed from October 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-43, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-43.

● (1805)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 474)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Anders
Anderson	Angus
Armstrong	Ashton
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brosseau
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Comartin
Côté	Cullen
Daniel	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dreeschen	Dubé
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Freeman	Galipeau
Gallant	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain

Giguère	Gill
Glover	Godin
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Gravelle
Grewal	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hassainia
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	James
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kellway	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Lauzon	Lavardière
Lebel	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leslie
Leung	Liu
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Michaud	Miller
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nicholson	Norlock
Nunez-Melo	Obhrai
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	Papillon
Patry	Payne
Péclet	Perreault
Plamondon	Poilievre
Preston	Quach
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Ravignat
Raynault	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Saxton
Schellenberger	Scott
Seeback	Sellah
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Stewart
Stoffèr	Storseth
Strahl	Sullivan
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Turmel	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Williamson
Wilks	Woodworth
Wong	Young (Oakville)
Yelich	Zimmer — 252
Young (Vancouver South)	

Government Orders

NAYS

Members

Andrews	Bélanger
Bennett	Brisson
Byrne	Casey
Cotler	Cuzner
Dion	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter	Eyking
Footé	Fry
Garneau	Goodale
Hsu	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
MacAulay	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Murray	Pacetti
Rae	Regan
Scarpaleggia	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
St-Denis	
Valerioté — 31	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

INCREASING OFFENDERS' ACCOUNTABILITY FOR VICTIMS ACT

The House resumed from October 5 consideration of the motion that bill C-37, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the previous question at the second reading stage of Bill C-37.

• (1815)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 475)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Bloch	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro

Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leaf
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
Obhrai
O'Neill Gordon
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Seeback
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 155

Dreeshen
Dykstra
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hyer
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Mourani
Norlock
O'Connor
Opitz
Plamondon
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélanger
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Brahmi
Brosseau
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Choquette
Christopherson
Comartin
Cotler
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Dionne Labelle

Government Orders

Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Gameau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclat
Perreault	Quach
Rae	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro (sor)	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Toone	Tremblay
Turmel	Valerioté— 128

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The next question is on the main motion.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, the NDP agrees to apply the vote and will vote yes.

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals agree to apply the vote and will be voting no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is in favour.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I will be voting yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the Green Party will be voting no.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Mr. Speaker, I will be voting yes.

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 476*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Anders
Anderson	Angus
Armstrong	Ashton
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brosseau
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooogé
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Comartin
Côté	Cullen
Daniel	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dreeschen	Dubé
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Freeman	Galipeau
Gallant	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Gill
Glover	Godin
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Gravelle
Grewal	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hassainia
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	James
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kellway	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Lauzon	Laverdière
Lebel	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Leaf	Leitch

Lemieux
 Leung
 Lizon
 Lukiwski
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mai
 Martin
 Mathysen
 McColeman
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
 Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
 Mourani
 Nantel
 Nicholls
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 O'Neill Gordon
 Papillon
 Payne
 Perreault
 Poilievre
 Quach
 Rajotte
 Ravignat
 Reid
 Richards
 Ritz
 Saganash
 Saxton
 Scott
 Sellah
 Shipley
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Stewart
 Storseth
 Sullivan
 Tilson
 Toone
 Trost
 Truppe
 Tweed
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Warawa
 Watson
 Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer— 251

Leslie
 Liu
 Lobb
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 Marston
 Masse
 Mayes
 McLeod
 Menzies
 Michaud
 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
 Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
 Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
 Mulcair
 Nash
 Nicholson
 Nunez-Melo
 O'Connor
 Opitz
 Patry
 Péclet
 Plamondon
 Preston
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Raynault
 Rempel
 Rickford
 Rousseau
 Sandhu
 Schellenberger
 Seeback
 Shea
 Shory
 Sitsabaiesan
 Sopuck
 Stanton
 Stoffer
 Strahl
 Sweet
 Toet
 Tremblay
 Trottier
 Turmel
 Uppal
 Van Loan
 Wallace
 Warrentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
 Wilks
 Wong
 Yelich
 Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Andrews
 Bennett
 Byrne
 Cotler
 Dion
 Easter
 Foote
 Garneau
 Hsu
 MacAulay
 McCallum
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Pacetti
 Regan
 Sgro
 St-Denis

Bélanger
 Brison
 Casey
 Cuzner
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Eyking
 Fry
 Goodale
 LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
 May
 McGuinty
 Murray
 Rae
 Scarpaleggia
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
 sor)
 Valeriote— 32

PAIRED

Nil

Private Members' Business

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being 6:19 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

PATENT ACT

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP) moved that Bill C-398, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is a somewhat emotional moment for me to see debate begin this evening on Bill C-398, the purpose of which is to reform Canada's access to medicines regime. Essentially, this bill could save hundreds of thousands of lives. I am therefore really very honoured.

This is not the first time that the House has had the opportunity to discuss a bill of this type, that is, a bill relating to Canada's access to medicines regime. It may therefore be worthwhile to review the history of that regime. In 2004, the House of Commons unanimously adopted Canada's access to medicines regime, in response to World Trade Organization decisions designed to ensure that patent legislation did not prevent the developed countries from doing their basic humanitarian duty and providing medicines to people in the most disadvantaged countries, who are in desperate need of them.

Unfortunately, in the years that followed, we realized that the system approved in 2004 was not working, because there were all sorts of obstacles and problems with its basic model.

[*English*]

In fact, during the first attempt at using CAMR, Canada's access to medicines regime, people rapidly realized that there were too many roadblocks that were not foreseen when the original law was drafted. There was basically too much red tape preventing it from functioning.

[*Translation*]

And so it was decided that something had to be done to make sure that Canada's access to medicines regime did what it was meant to do. Accordingly, in 2009, the first bill to reform Canada's access to medicines regime was introduced. It is important to note that the bill had widespread support at the time.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Tens of thousands of citizens signed a petition supporting the bill. A poll revealed that 80% of Canadians approved of the bill. Civil society rose to the challenge and numerous organizations, some of which are here this evening, started speaking out and working very hard in support of the bill. Finally, MPs from all parties united in the House of Commons to approve the bill. Unfortunately, it died on the order paper.

[Translation]

As my mother would have said: "Measure twice, cut once." That is why we have to get back to work on this today and put this bill back on the agenda. We have to do it because this is a necessary bill, one that so many people are hoping for.

[English]

In the last few months I have met numerous actors. I have talked to loads of people concerned with this issue. I have met with brand name and generic pharmaceutical companies. I have met with citizens; with civil society organizations; with people active in the field, working in Africa, for example; and with MPs and senators. I can say that I am really confident that together we can achieve this. We can reform CAMR and make it work.

● (1825)

[Translation]

The essential point is that reforming Canada's access to medicines regime is a win-win situation. The pharmaceutical companies win, of course. They gain access to new markets—markets, it is important to note, that are of little or negligible importance to the biggest pharmaceutical companies. Africa, for example, represents only 2% of the big pharmaceutical companies' sales. This is a win for generic drug companies.

The big pharmaceutical companies also win because they are making a social contribution. That is important. I know it is important to them and they are committed to this. They lose very little, because we are talking about markets that hold little value for them, as I said, and they receive royalties.

Canadian taxpayers also win. They win, first, because the bill will not cost them a single penny. As someone said, the only cost associated with the bill is the electricity for evenings when we sit like this and discuss the bill. However, they win at an even more basic level, because this bill will mean that more can be done with our very limited development assistance resources.

As has been said, it is very simple: the generic drug companies will allow medicines to be supplied that will be cheaper, much cheaper, because the competition the generic companies engage in, in the markets, is the biggest factor in reducing the cost of medicines; in fact, this factor can reduce costs by up to 95%. That amounts to an enormous figure. So we can do a lot more with the same amount of money, and this in turn will make our co-operation much more effective.

I have lived in Africa. I have seen the effect these diseases have on people. We are talking about AIDS, but also about tuberculosis and malaria. Those diseases do not just destroy lives; they destroy families and communities. They are often the main factor holding

back development in these countries. If we want the money we invest in international aid to be effective, it is absolutely essential that we use this tool to help combat these public health crises.

The pharmaceutical companies and Canadian taxpayers win, but ultimately, and most importantly, let us not forget that people in the developing countries win, human beings who are in desperate need of these medicines.

We must remember that sub-Saharan Africa is the region most affected by the AIDS pandemic and more often than not does not have the resources to deal with it. Sub-Saharan Africa is where 90% of the children in the world who have AIDS live, and one child in two born with HIV will die before their second birthday.

We are talking about tens, hundreds of thousands of people who are waiting for this aid, people for whom it will make things enormously better.

● (1830)

[English]

This also highlights the fact that the functioning CAMR would contribute significantly to the government's child and maternal health initiative and would stretch our aid money by providing low-cost medicine to the people who need it most. I think it is really a win-win situation for everyone.

We can reform CAMR and make it work. If we can do it, then we should do it because it will save lives.

[Translation]

We can do it by working together and listening to all the Canadians who have already stood up, who have been standing up for years, to say this is the right thing to do, it is what they want their representatives to do.

In fact, on the question of the contributions by Canadians and Canadian organizations all across the country, I cannot fail to mention the extraordinary role played by so many individuals and organizations that have put all their energy into supporting this private member's bill.

[English]

I am thinking in particular of Richard Elliott of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, and Pat Evans, Bonnie Johnson, Andrea Beal, Bev McGibbon and Norah Menzies of the Grandmothers Advocacy Network, also known as GRAN.

I am talking about Meg French and Carleen McGuinty of UNICEF.

I am talking about Tara Fischer and Robin Jackson of the Canadian Federation of University Women.

I am talking about Anne Gardiner of Bracelet of Hope, and Pastor James Qhobela of the Apostolic Faith Mission Social Development Division of Lesotho and his wife, who I had the pleasure of meeting.

I am talking about Ariane Cartwright of Results Canada.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

I also want to express special thanks to the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale, or AQOCI, and its executive director, Gervais L'Heureux, for their support. Thanks to support like that from partners and from tens of thousands of Canadians who have stood up and called on their representatives to approve this bill, we can do it. We can reform Canada's access to medicines regime and we can save lives, in the interests of us all.

[English]

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Richard Elliott, the executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, who was mentioned by my hon. colleague in her speech but who is also a constituent in my riding of Toronto—Danforth, for his continuous dedication to this issue.

Richard, in a recent interview in *Embassy* magazine, had the following observation:

Overcoming the global gap in access to medicines requires multiple, complementary strategies. But ensuring more affordable medicines for low- and middle-income countries is a necessary part of the solution.... They need to harness the power of competition in the marketplace to make medicines affordable. This is why it's important to make the access to medicines regime work—even as it should be complemented by other efforts....

Would my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie elaborate a bit further on the bill being a part of the solution but never something that we should expect to be the solution, in and of itself?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Toronto—Danforth. I absolutely agree that this is an essential part of the solution, but not the whole solution.

I was speaking just today with Pastor Qhobela. People tell him they need doctors, infrastructure and hospitals first, but he wondered what it would accomplish to have doctors and hospitals if they do not have medicines to treat the patients. He talked about meeting a nurse who had simply resigned from his position because he was discouraged. He would have liked to do things to help people, but he did not have the medicines he needed to do that.

There is another part of the solution to the problem. When people need to pay less for medicines and the price is affordable, that frees up resources for other activities that will contribute to solving the problem.

• (1835)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my friend, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, on this extraordinary initiative.

She just said—and that really intrigued me—that this frees up money for other things.

Is it reasonable to expect that the money that will be freed up by not having to buy drugs could be invested in building hospitals and hiring doctors?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, let us look at the global health fund, for example. There are fewer and fewer resources available to cope with the major challenges it must face.

When the global health fund is forced to invest what little it has in buying drugs, this does not leave room for other initiatives. I do not think that we can assume that the savings from drug purchases will automatically be allocated to other infrastructure. However, having access to more affordable drugs will certainly free up resources within the countries and among donors and multilateral organizations and allow them to continue working on other aspects.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to say a few words about the difference in the quality of the drugs made in Canada and the role that this plays in the competition between drugs from Canada and drugs from other countries.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question and for his general interest in this bill.

I cannot underscore enough the importance and quality of Canada's pharmaceutical industry and its capacity to positively contribute to resolving a global problem. Of course there are other suppliers of generic products in other countries, but I have tremendous faith in the capacity of Canada's industry and the quality of its products. We must not forget the importance of competition for reducing prices either.

[English]

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-398, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes), which aims to modify certain fundamental aspects of Canada's access to medicines regime.

I join many members of the House in viewing the regime as a key component of Canada's long-term, multi-faceted approach to addressing the serious public health problems that affect many low and middle-income countries. However, this is only one weapon in the arsenal Canada has put together to fight disease, to provide access to medicines and to improve health conditions in the developing world.

In addition to our access to medicines regime, Canada makes significant contributions to global mechanisms for the procurement of low-cost drugs to respond to the needs of the developing world. Canada continues to provide leadership in the global fight against diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Canadians are proud to have invested more per capita than any other country, according to the global fund.

Our comprehensive approach combines prevention of the spread of disease in co-operation with international partners to increase the impact of our funding and lower delivery costs; leadership, through initiatives such as the Muskoka initiative, to improve the health of children and mothers; and innovation to provide the right climate for the development of new medicines and treatments. Our strong track record of support also includes being a founding donor to the global drug facility, being the single largest donor of first-line tuberculosis drugs and working with the Gates Foundation to advance the HIV vaccine.

Private Members' Business

We embrace the bill's laudable objectives of improving public health in the developing world. However, it would not accomplish this goal.

Independent experts have testified that it would not benefit those in need. It cannot change the fact that there is a demand for lower-cost generic drugs from emerging markets. For instance, India produces 80% of the antivirals funded by countries such as Canada for the developing world. The bill would eliminate many of the checks and balances that were built into the current regime to prevent misuse, which could harm researchers who have invested their energy and know-how into developing new life-saving drugs. The approach suggested in the bill would hold back continued pharmaceutical investment here in Canada and reduce the type of new and innovative therapies being brought to the Canadian market.

Finally, many of the bill's proposed changes are not in keeping with the spirit of the World Trade Organization decision on which Canada's access to medicines regime is based. This decision was designed to provide access to countries facing health emergencies but lacking the means of acquiring needed medicines. The intention of the decision was to remove patents viewed as a barrier to the supply of drugs needed to address public health issues in developing nations. The decision brought together divergent stakeholder views to come up with the appropriate response to public health issues in the developing world, while at the same time respecting intellectual property protections. It was viewed as just one part of the broader international strategy to combat diseases that impact the developing world, a strategy to which Canada has been a key contributor.

In the end, the decision achieved the unanimous support of all members of the World Trade Organization. The World Trade Organization decision ensures that patent rules do not preclude the manufacturing and exporting of cheaper generic copies of patented medicines to the developing countries facing public health emergencies. The international consensus was that it was important to have safeguards to guarantee that the system would only be used for humanitarian purposes and would not be used and diverted for unintended purposes.

Canada's access to medicines regime incorporated all the key elements required by the World Trade Organization decision. It provides a framework for countries to access less expensive generic versions of patented drugs. It also respects Canada's domestic intellectual property framework.

Why is a stable and predictable international intellectual property regime important in Canada?

● (1840)

Intellectual property protection provides incentives for companies to invest in research and development into new and innovative drugs and medical devices. This research and development benefits all Canadians by improving our knowledge, generating research infrastructure, creating more highly paid, skilled jobs in Canada and leading to innovations that will help people live longer, healthier and more productive lives.

The protection and promotion of patents and innovation in the domestic pharmaceutical sector is also key in achieving this government's international humanitarian objectives. The generic

industry relies on its brand name competitors to innovate in order to have the products to copy and to sell here in Canada and abroad.

Bill C-398 would interfere with the balanced approach of Canada's access to medical regime and make Canada a less stable, less reliable and less welcoming place for those people who want to invest and innovate.

There are clear reasons to believe that the proposed amendments would be inconsistent with Canada's trade obligations and harm our relationship of trust with our international trading and research partners.

The provisions of the Canadian access to medicines regime were carefully considered, designed and implemented to comply with the World Trade Organization rules. The intention of these rules was to address serious health issues in low and middle-income countries and not to create a system of exporting an unlimited amount of medicines for any reason without the proper checks. These rules require that countries have to notify the World Trade Organization of their intention to use the system. Bill C-398 would remove this requirement and, along with other proposed changes, would alter the intended purpose of the regime. It would also remove the mandatory safety reviews by Health Canada that are currently required.

Canada's approach has a proven track record of improving access to treatment and health care delivery. Together, the global efforts that Canada supports are producing significant results. The supply of lower cost medicines has increased as has their ability to those in need. I will give one example. According to the World Health Organization, nearly eight million people living with HIV in low and middle-income countries are now receiving HIV antiviral treatment.

Our government continues to support an access to medicine regime with the proper checks and balances, that respects our international obligations and serves as one essential part of a comprehensive approach to improving health and fighting diseases in developing countries.

For those reasons, I urge all members of the House not to support Bill C-398.

* * *

● (1845)

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 13

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I offer the following motion. I move:

That the order for consideration of ways and means Motion No. 13 be deemed read, the motion to concur deemed moved and seconded, the question deemed put and the recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, October 17 at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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]

PATENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-398, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie for bringing this matter before us again by introducing this bill.

[English]

I thank the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie for bringing forward Bill C-398, which would amend the Canadian access to medicines regime. It is my pleasure to speak today in support of the bill and to move it to committee stage by voting for it at second reading. It is time to move the bill to committee and move on the legislative process, which was interrupted in the last election after it passed this House with support from all parties.

We are very fortunate in Canada that we live in a country where we are able to benefit from medication and as a country we have the infrastructure and the know-how to produce medicines. As Canadians, we also feel that we have an obligation to help those around the planet who are less fortunate, who are sick or dying and could be helped if they had access to medicines that exist today.

That was the motivation for Bill C-9, the original Canada access to medicines regime, also known as the Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa Act.

Some medicines are expensive and the point of CAMR is to make available to developing countries safe, generic versions of medicines manufactured in Canada and to do it within international rules on trade and on intellectual property rights. It is intended to provide the competitive pressure to reduce the cost barrier to those countries that would never be able to afford the medicine but would greatly benefit from it and where people are in dire need of the medicine. We know that other countries can produce generic drugs but the Canadian product is produced with higher standards in quality control and it will provide competition on that basis.

CAMR came into force in 2005 but, as people have noticed, since that time this regime has only been used to provide one shipment of

medicine to one country so far, which is why we believe there are barriers. One of the barriers that has been identified is the cumbersome licensing process.

The core of Bill C-398 is to provide the so-called one licence solution, which would remove the need for each individual country to make a request for a compulsory licence to produce generic drugs that are needed for serious health problems in these countries. It would remove the need for individual countries to apply and, instead, a Canadian generic pharmaceutical manufacturer would apply for the licence for all countries.

This reform has been sought for several years now, and in the previous Parliament, Bill C-393, upon which Bill C-398 is based, passed this House with support from all parties and probably would have come into force had the May 2011 election not been called.

I want to expand a little bit on the remarks that my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie made and I want to talk a little bit about intellectual property issues, which were the subject of the speech by my hon. colleague from the Conservative benches.

Advocates for reforming CAMR do not wish to jeopardize pharmaceutical R and D in Canada. They have said that an I think they do believe in the importance of the knowledge economy, and one of its pillars, the value of intellectual property.

I think we all agree that Canada's future will depend very much on its participation in the knowledge economy and nobody wants our kids to be competing in the world on the basis of providing the lowest cost labour. I believe that the drafters of Bill C-398 recognize some of these concerns.

● (1850)

For example, Bill C-398 improves upon Bill C-393 in that respect by specifying that Canadian generic manufacturers must post online the quantities of medicine being exported to each country. They must also put online the notification that each WTO country gave to the WTO trade related aspects of intellectual property rights council, or, for a non-WTO country, the notice that country gave to the Government of Canada.

The old bill, Bill C-393 from the last Parliament, at first removed a two-year time limit on licences before a renewal was required. In the last Parliament this was amended in committee to restore that time limit. Bill C-398 keeps that two-year time limit in the current draft. Drafters of the bill have responded to concerns about an open-ended licence in time.

In the spirit of the changes that the drafters of Bill C-398 have made, compared to Bill C-393 that already passed the House in the last Parliament, we could make some amendments to emphasize that it is not the intent of the bill to negatively impact any R and D investment in Canada. It is not the intent of the bill to devalue intellectual property that is a pillar of a knowledge economy.

Private Members' Business

People have asked me, for example, why Qatar is on the list of countries in the bill. It is a country with a per capita income of \$90,000 per annum. I believe that no one wants that distraction. It really is distracting from the fact that people are sick and dying and need medicines that they cannot afford. Therefore, this is something we could look at in committee, the list of countries in schedule 2 of the bill, to remove these distractions that may lead people to question some aspects of the bill.

My colleague from the Conservative Party is worrying about safety issues. Some critics have worried that the generic drugs would not be subjected to safety reviews. However, section 21.04(3)(b) in the current legislation remains unchanged under Bill C-398 and affirms that any generic product must meet the requirements of the Food and Drugs Act and its regulations. Therefore, my hon. colleague is incorrect when he makes that point. It is an old point that was made in the past but this bill is slightly different and that point is covered. In fact, the advantage of importing drugs from Canada is that products are manufactured with higher standards and with better quality control.

I will be voting in favour of the bill. It is time to move toward reforming Canada's access to medicines regime, a process that was accidentally interrupted at the last election, but which had already passed the House. We must not delay in sending the bill to the next stage of the legislative process, to committee where we can examine it and related issues in detail, as we should examine every bill. We must move this bill to committee and I urge my colleagues to vote for the bill at second reading.

• (1855)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the Bill C-398. I will start by giving some context to this bill. Then I will build on what has already been mentioned.

I want to discuss where this bill will matter the most, and that is in places like Africa. In fact, it is where the Prime Minister just visited, the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was there a couple of years ago to see some of the projects that had been funded by the World Bank. One of the projects I remember well was the HIV testing labs that had been set up. This was a good project. It was one that allowed people access to testing for HIV-AIDS and other diseases. Particularly important, was that access to testing there had been elusive and the capacity was set up. This is important because this is part of the bill that people have critiqued before, the capacity on the ground and that some might interfere.

I was able to see the testing being done with modern equipment. Testing all people was very successful, young people, men and women, and it was done in a way that we would see here. There was the same standard of anonymous testing that allowed people to be tested without stigma, which has been a huge problem during the years that people have been fighting this disease and others.

I was then taken to a warehouse, which Canada in the past had been helping out, where medicines were stored. That warehouse was half empty. This was the place where the medicines were stored for the people who had been tested and identified as having the HIV virus, in some cases full blown AIDS and other diseases were reliant upon. I was stunned. I was there with members of Parliament from other countries and asked where all the medicines were. They said

that they could not get any. I asked why not and they said that was the problem with the system, that they could not get any because there were problems with patent barriers and getting safe drugs.

I will never forget it because we essentially gave people false hope. We gave them the indication that we were going to be helping them out, fortifying their health system and ensuring that people who we wanted to help were going to be identified first. We all know that without the next step, without providing treatment, we are essentially giving people notification of a death sentence. We are not there to help them. In fact we are there to say, "Here you are, here is your death sentence", and walk away from them. That is what I saw on the ground in the Congo. That story is happening right across the developing world. We can do something about that. This bill is about that.

We can talk, and I will, about compliance, what happens with the WTO. This is about standards and ensuring there will be requirements in this bill to ensure we are going to follow the highest standards we have in place and not jeopardize the pharmaceutical, generic or research companies. We will be saying that a kid in the Congo will get the same access as my son would get, or a woman with HIV-AIDS in any part of the developing world will have the same access as my sister or nieces. That is what this is about. Fundamentally, this is about social justice. That is why so many people are in favour of it.

When we passed the bill in the House, I was very proud to be the author of the bill. However, it was not about me. It was about many people in the House who saw the value of working together as members of Parliament to make a difference for people in the rest of the world, in particular, the people in two-thirds of the world who live in poverty. It was a proud moment for me. I saw members of the Conservative Party working with members of the Liberal Party, the Bloc and New Democrats. It was a very proud day.

• (1900)

I would like to re-energize the House on this bill again. For those who might have some questions, let us talk about it. Let us see how we can make this work.

As was mentioned already, when the bill was first passed, it was a great idea. However, looking at the record, we were unable to get the drugs to those countries that needed them because of the barriers. Rwanda tried once, but there were too many barriers and it would not do it again.

This is analogous to getting oneself, or someone in one's family, a prescription for a life-saving medicine, but each time a pill is needed, one has to go back to the doctor, get the prescription, go to the store again and one may not even have money to buy it. This is what we are talking about, but on a national scale.

Private Members' Business

The bill would refine the process to have one licence. Therefore, once there is an arrangement between a country, ourselves and industry, it is done.

Do we monitor? Absolutely, and those provisions have been talked about. Do we make sure there is quality? Yes, no question about it. Who would want to jeopardize the quality of Canadian drugs?

One of the stories we heard today was from a senator who had been to Uganda. It was a very touching story about a pen pal of her grandson who she went to meet on a regular basis in Uganda. This past year she went to meet with this young boy, who is younger than my son who turns 14 today, and it was for the last time. She could not meet with him because he did not have access to safe malaria drugs in Uganda. This is the real world now and this bill could deal with that.

There are so many stories. There are stories of women who have been tested and have been told they can be helped. They could be given first-line treatment and if that did not work, then they could go to the second-line treatment. On this file, things have not stayed static, some things are fluid, and that is another important point.

We have fought the fight against HIV-AIDS and we have won many battles. We have not found the cure, but we have been able to manage the disease. However, as members know, over time the virus adapts to some of these medicines, so we need to have second and third-line regimes, or different combinations of drugs. The bill deals with this as well and it is crucial for the people we have helped in the past to stay alive.

For my friend for Peace River, let us talk. Anyone on that side who has a concern, let us sit down and talk. We have been talking to industry and this is something we can do. There are so many people who are counting on us to do this. This is not the time to turn away. It is not about partisanship. This is about reaching out to each other to help people somewhere else.

I am so damn proud of what the House did before. I saw Conservative members and people from all parts of Canada come together, faith communities particularly, standing up to say that they were going to do something to help their fellow men, women and children. They did not want to talk about it; they wanted to do it. Fundamentally, that is what the bill is about and that is why I support it.

We need to talk about the issues so we can solve the problem. When I go back to Congo with any member of Parliament and we go to that warehouse after people have been tested, we will not see an empty warehouse. We will see it full. We will see people being taken care of. When we are asked, we can say that we stood up, we were there for people and we made a difference.

•(1905)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address Bill C-398, an act to amend the Patent Act, drugs for international humanitarian purposes. Unfortunately, even though we have heard a lot of discussion tonight, this bill would make Canada's Access to Medicines Regime unworkable and would not address the real challenges that face those suffering from disease.

Every member of the House shares a deep concern for the millions who are suffering from grave public health crises in the developing world. The statistics from the World Health Organization quite honestly are tragic. Nearly one million people, most of them children under the age of five years, die of malaria annually. Globally, more than 5,000 people die of AIDS every day. As Canadians, we will continue to do our part to make a difference. Our government has an approach that works to fight these diseases internationally.

The Canadian government has proven to be a global leader and highly active international partner in the fight against HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria. In addition to our continued support of Canada's Access to Medicines Regime as an avenue to access Canadian-made generic drugs, our government has been a key contributor to global efforts to supply low cost drugs to millions of people in need.

For instance, Canada has contributed \$540 million to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria for 2011-13. The global fund disburses funding for programs that reduce the impact of HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in low and middle-income countries. It has become one of the most significant factors in the fight against these diseases, treating 3.6 million people with HIV-AIDS, treating 9.3 million people with tuberculosis and distributing 270 million nets to prevent the spread of malaria.

Canada has a clear plan and a proven track record that is producing tangible results for public health in low and middle-income countries. Canada's substantial financial support through international partners has vastly improved access to treatment and health care delivery. Over 6.6 million people were receiving drug treatment for HIV-AIDS in Africa in 2010. That is over 23 times as many as the 280,000 who were receiving such treatment in 2002, just 10 years ago. In 2010, over 7.7 million people were receiving treatment for TB. That is 4 times as many as the 1.7 million who were receiving it in 2000.

Other major Canadian commitments include \$450 million over 10 years to the Africa health systems initiative to ensure facilities and expertise are in place to make effective use of medicines. We have provided \$149 million to the Global Drug Facility to stop tuberculosis, which has delivered more than 20 million treatments in 93 countries. Above all, Canada has been a leader in mobilizing global action by providing a total contribution of \$2.85 billion to improve child and maternal health.

Private Members' Business

Of all the countries that have put in place an access to medicines regime, Canada is the only country to successfully use its regime to export drugs to a developing country. It took the government just two weeks to grant Apotex Inc., a Canadian generic pharmaceutical company, a license to export an HIV-AIDS drug to Rwanda. Canada's access to medicines regime, with the appropriate safeguards in place, ensured that high quality Canadian generic drugs reached those who needed them most. Rwanda now has one of the highest rates of antiretroviral coverage at almost 90% and HIV prevalence is now below 3% of the general population of Rwanda.

• (1910)

While we have made great strides in combatting these public health problems, we are not done. This bill, while laudable in its objectives, will not increase participation in Canada's access to medicines regime. Changing the regime will not change the fact that other avenues are used to procure low-cost drugs for low and middle income countries, such as the global fund to which Canada is a very strong contributor.

Some of the countries are able to find low-cost sources of generic medicines in the market, for instance, from producers in emerging markets such as India, which supplies an estimated 80% of donor-funded antiretrovirals to developing countries without needing to draw on Canada's access to medicines regime.

The Canadian regime can and will assist in the international supply of low-cost drugs only if there is an external demand for a Canadian generic drug.

This bill does not address the issues underlying the pressing health needs of the developing world. For many, changing patent rules for drugs is not the most relevant issue. In fact, more than 95% of the drugs that are sought are not patent-protected. Conditions such as poverty in developing countries are more significant obstacles to acquiring pharmaceuticals and appropriate health care.

We have heard testimony from a variety of witnesses with detailed knowledge of public health issues in the developing world. They would agree that continued investment is needed to strengthen national health systems, including human resources, technology and basic health infrastructure. The changes proposed by Bill C-398 would not make progress on these underlying issues.

In fact, Bill C-398 would remove essential safeguards. The bill would allow a generic manufacturer to export an unlimited amount of its drug. It would remove mandatory safety reviews by Health Canada, and it would reduce the transparency of the system. Bill C-398 would risk exported drugs being diverted back to richer, developed country markets.

This bill's approach is not in keeping with the World Trade Organization decision upon which Canada's access to medicines regime is based. It would undermine our trade relationships and reduce our access to key international research partnerships to help fight these very diseases.

In addition, by removing the key checks and balances of the regime, the bill could hinder continued pharmaceutical investment and growth in Canada.

Canada's access to medicines regime has an important role to play in providing access to cheaper generic drugs in developing nations, but it is just one tool among many. We will continue to encourage those in need to use the system and stand ready to respond to a request from any country in need that notifies us of its intention to import drugs.

We remain deeply committed to pursuing our comprehensive approach, providing Canadian leadership in the fight against disease and working to raise health care standards in the developing world.

• (1915)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate with the hon. member for Guelph, I will just let him know that I will have to interrupt him about four minutes into his remarks. The remaining time will be available to him the next time the House considers the motion. The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from time to time we have an opportunity to discuss an issue that is so fundamentally important that the question of action is not if, but how.

Before us today is a bill that will address the ongoing and terribly destructive crisis with access to medicines in developing and least developed countries across the world. While this bill is not perfect, there is a balance to be struck between maintaining our country's commitment to intellectual property protection while ensuring that we do not build unnecessary barriers limiting access to the medicines that are much needed in developing countries. That is why it is important to get this legislation to committee for closer examination.

We have no excuse for inaction. The House already passed a version of this bill in the last Parliament and the problem is not going away. It has been eight years since the Liberal government of the day put forward a bill that established a legal framework for Canada's access to medicine regime. The bill, otherwise known as Jean Chrétien's pledge to Africa act, was meant to create a balance between addressing our commitment to combat HIV and AIDS and simultaneously honouring intellectual property rights and trade obligations. The bill passed unanimously. Through that legislation, parliamentarians of all stripes signalled that it was a priority that there be timely access to affordable generic versions of patented drugs meant to fight HIV-AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases that are killing thousands of vulnerable men, women and children every day. As an international leader, we could not stand idly by and watch others suffer without trying to help.

Adjournment Proceedings

It has since become clear that the bill, well-intentioned as it was, proved ineffective in accomplishing its main role. Whether it has been overly complex or onerous or unresponsive to the urgent needs of countries in need, Canada's access to medicines regime has simply not lived up to its intended purpose. That is not to say that we should throw the baby out with the bathwater. There are solutions and we must move forward to implement them and reach these noble goals.

The bill before us today contains workable solutions to the administrative burdens that have made CAMR frustratingly inaccessible. In fact, we saw this legislation before the last Parliament as Bill C-393, and the House of Commons passed it before it died in the Senate when Parliament was dissolved for a general election.

I remember its passage from the House as one of the proudest moments in my time here, standing with a majority of fellow members, Liberals, NDP, the Bloc and several Conservatives alike saying to the world that we would help. At that time I argued that we could, and I still firmly believe that we can, pass this legislation and prolong lives while preventing the transmission of insidious diseases like HIV-AIDS. We can renew a lease on life for ailing parents, confident in the knowledge that they can live to provide for their loved ones, secure in knowing that they will not transmit the disease to their children. It is not enough to wish it were so, and words certainly will not make it true. Action is necessary. We can act now and finally address this head on.

Mr. Speaker, I will defer to you, understanding that I will have six minutes remaining when called upon again.

• (1920)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That is exactly correct. The hon. member for Guelph will have six minutes remaining for his remarks when the House next resumes debate on the question.

The time for consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to be here to discuss and bring back to this House a very important question that I asked of the government some months ago. I will repeat the final question. When will the federal government partner with provinces and first nations to put an end to the unacceptable living conditions that aboriginal people in Canada face?

As the member of Parliament for Churchill, I have the honour of representing 33 first nations. In some of these first nations, in fact in most of them and certainly in parts of all of them, there are people who are truly living in third world conditions. It is a message that I

get day in and day out in the work that I do in northern Manitoba and the reality that so many first nations face across Canada. As we know, that is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as ours. The fact of the matter is that there is work being done on the ground to address their poor living conditions, including non-existent housing and the need to access health care. However, that work is not being done by all of the partners that need to be around the table. Notably, the missing partner is the federal government.

I will address the need to have the federal government play a true partnering role with the province and first nations when it comes, for example, to the all-weather road on the east side of Manitoba, a truly tremendous undertaking providing jobs for first nations in the area. For the first time in history, roads will be built between first nations that have been isolated, allowing them access to materials and health care and education services to a much greater extent. Unfortunately, the federal government has not been at the table to support this critical initiative.

I will also mention education. The province has made serious commitments with respect to the University College of the North. Unfortunately, the federal government has also been absent in that respect. In fact, it was due to the efforts of the late Jack Layton some years ago that there was at least some federal funding for the UCN at the time. Unfortunately, under the current government we have not seen a commitment. We hope that the federal government will shore up its commitment to education by supporting such critical initiatives as the University College of the North, but also by investing in K-12 education, recognizing that institutions like the Frontier Collegiate Institute in Cranberry Portage require federal funding for the first nations students sent there. The federal government ought to be part of a partnership to support primary and secondary education among aboriginal youth.

We also hope that the federal government will be part of a job creation strategy. The provincial government has been doing that kind of work with first nations, but unfortunately what we have seen from the federal government are damaging cuts when it comes to employment insurance and a total absence from the table when it comes to economic development that would benefit first nations and eradicate the third world living conditions so many of them face. That is the kind of action we would like to see in northern Manitoba and across Canada when it comes to making a difference for first nations people.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the question from the member for Churchill.

Let me begin by reassuring my hon. colleague that our government continues to work with willing partners to improve the quality of life of aboriginal people. We have made significant targeted investments that have a direct impact on living conditions, including education, water and housing.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let me remind the hon. member that economic action plan 2012 contained significant financial and legislative commitments to support our government's approach to improving the living conditions of aboriginal people. We have taken concrete steps to address water and waste water issues on reserve to ensure that first nation communities have access to safe drinking water.

Economic action plan 2012 includes almost \$331 million, over two years, to help sustain progress made to build and renovate water infrastructure on reserve and to support the development of a long-term strategy to improve water quality in first nation communities. In addition, in February 2012, we introduced Bill S-8, the safe drinking water and first nations act, to ensure enforceable drinking water standards for first nations on reserve.

These initiatives and investments build on the concrete actions our government has taken since 2006 to support first nation communities in improving access to potable water, including sustainable development and investments under Canada's economic action plan and the first nations water and waste water action plan. These examples demonstrate our government's commitment to address the issues of water and waste water on reserve and to ensure first nations have access to safe, clean drinking water.

We are also very proud of our record of partnership and collaboration with provinces and first nations. A good example is our commitment to working with first nation partners to provide first nation students with the quality education they require to realize their aspirations. In collaboration with first nation partners, we are working on a concrete agenda to improve the education outcomes of first nation students and to provide them with the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to enter the labour market and to participate fully in a strong Canadian economy.

Of the \$270 million announced in budget 2012, \$100 million will be used to provide early literacy programming and other supports and services for first nation schools and students, and to strengthen the relationships with provincial school systems. This also includes \$175 million to build and renovate schools on reserve, providing first nation students with better learning environments.

Our government will also work to explore mechanisms to ensure stable, predictable, sustainable funding for first nation elementary and secondary education. Access to high-quality education is crucial to success later in life. We believe that all Canadians benefit when first nation students can access education and can fulfill their aspirations.

When it comes to food security for aboriginal communities, our government supports this initiative through a number of programs, including nutrition north Canada. Nutrition north Canada is a program that helps provide northerners with greater access to nutritional perishable food, such as fruits, vegetables, bread, meat, milk and eggs. Furthermore, this program benefits 103 remote northern communities in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Our government remains committed to improving the lives of aboriginal people, as these initiatives truly demonstrate. This is definitely in contradiction to the direction the NDP would take us.

As the member opposite mentioned, her party's preference would be to elevate taxes, to focus on something that we would really prefer not to focus on. The NDP wants to implement a \$21 billion carbon tax, something that would ensure that we cannot create jobs and provide opportunities for these young aboriginal Canadians. We are against that. We are going to be focused on ensuring that aboriginal Canadians can succeed.

• (1925)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that this conversation would focus on first nations' living conditions rather than the Conservative Party's talking points because the issue is grave.

With reference to access to clean water and sewer, I would invite the member across, and members of the government, to visit Garden Hill, St. Theresa Point and Wasagamack, which do not have full running water. In fact, only a small fraction of the community is serviced. Forty-nine high-risk aboriginal communities exist, when it comes to unsafe water access. First nations are 90% more likely than non-aboriginal communities to not have access to running water.

The member across brought up nutrition north, a program that many northerners have real concerns about because it is not working for their communities. We know this from the protests that we have seen in Nunavut, and certainly I know this from the communities that I represent.

With respect to education, I would like to see the federal government make a commitment to truly treat first nations with respect by working with them to find a way to invest in education appropriately rather than shutting the door on respectful, treaty-based negotiation.

I would hope for the day, and maybe it will take an NDP federal government, where first nations will be treated with respect.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, our government has consistently shown its commitment to aboriginal people through significant investments enabling them to participate in, contribute to and benefit from Canada's prosperity. We are taking concrete action on education, housing, family and child services, safe drinking water and other improvements on the pressing issues in first nation communities.

Our government is working with our partners to create jobs and growth in first nation communities, unlike the NDP who want to impose a \$20 billion carbon tax that would actually kill jobs for all Canadians including aboriginal Canadians. Together we are working to build a future in which first nations are self-sufficient and prosperous, making their own decisions, managing their own affairs and making strong contributions to the country as a whole.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government will continue to focus and work with first nation partners across Canada to deliver tangible and lasting results to ensure first nations are well positioned to be full participants in the Canadian economy.

• (1930)

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to talk about the cost of prisons.

With unbelievable cynicism, on October 14, 2011, the Minister of Justice invited the provinces to dip into the Canada social transfer to pay for the increased prison costs resulting from the passing of Bill C-10. In general, what is the Canada social transfer used for? It is used to fund social assistance, health care, social services and higher education, not to pay for this government's bills that have absolutely nothing to do with the Canada social transfer.

The minister even said this: "I note, in the last budget, an over \$2.4 billion increase in transfers," said Mr. Nicholson in Montreal, "and I know this will be very helpful to the provinces who have for the most part the responsibility of the administration of justice." It is as though he was telling the provinces that they had \$2 billion and that they should make do. It is as though the provinces do not have education or health care systems or anything else to manage.

In a detailed study, the Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques estimated that it would cost over \$18.8 billion to build prisons and that there would be \$3.8 billion in ongoing operating costs. The provinces will have to pay for three-quarters of the cost of the construction alone.

The Government of Quebec must therefore face the fact that 18 of its prisons are full. In practical terms, this means 565 to 1,048 additional beds in Quebec prisons. The cost of building new cells is estimated at approximately \$750 million and the ongoing costs associated with the arrival of additional inmates is estimated at approximately \$80 million.

Quebec was not the only one to protest. The other provinces also appealed to the government. Ontario even said that it would have to spend billions of dollars.

In order to save money, Quebec asked Ottawa to transfer ownership of the Leclerc Institution, which Ottawa wants to shut down. The federal government has invested \$3 million to renovate this penitentiary. It is unbelievable. Furthermore, we have already paid for it. The Correctional Service of Canada spent \$3 million on all kinds of renovations over two years, hundreds of thousands of dollars to install surveillance cameras, \$5,000 to renovate a supervisor's office, \$15,000 for painting, \$1 million for roofing, and much more.

What was the Minister of Public Safety's response to a question I asked yesterday about transferring ownership of the Leclerc Institution?

[*English*]

I certainly will look at the request.

[*Translation*]

We will wait and see. The government may do something.

The request was made in a letter from the former Quebec minister of public security dated May 8, 2012. The letter was reported by the media and stated that, in three years' time, the three new prisons in Quebec would not meet demand and that Quebec wanted the Leclerc Institution. The minister must have received the letter dated May 8, 2012.

The Conservative government has never fully costed its justice initiatives. The Conservatives are closing prisons even though they want to jail more people. That does not make sense. If they want to jail more people, they have to build prisons. Instead of closing prisons, they should be giving money to the provinces so they can cover the extra costs.

[*English*]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for too many years our criminal justice system was going in the wrong direction. It focused more on the rights of criminals instead of the rights of victims.

Since coming into office, our government has accomplished a great deal when it comes to cracking down on crime, better protecting Canadians and giving victims the rights and protections they deserve, but we know that more needs to be done, which is why we introduced Bill C-10.

As the hon. member may know, after lengthy debate and study, Bill C-10 was passed by Parliament and received royal assent on March 13, 2012. I would like to take a few minutes to remind the hon. member what exactly Bill C-10 accomplished.

A major component of the Safe Streets and Communities Act targeted criminals who sexually exploit children. Bill C-10 proposed denouncing all forms of child sexual abuse through the imposition of new and higher mandatory minimum penalties for people who prey on our most vulnerable, that is, our children.

Furthermore, Bill C-10 brought in two amendments to correct the gaps in the Criminal Code. The first amendment made it a crime when two adults conspire to set up a child for exploitation. The second amendment made it a crime to give a child sexually explicit material for the purpose of grooming that child for exploitation.

Another major component of our legislation targeted the source of the illicit drug trade, the drug traffickers. Bill C-10 has stiffened penalties for the production and trafficking of illegal drugs.

I remind the House that the criminals we are targeting with these amendments are those who are involved in selling drugs to kids on playgrounds and near schools.

In addition, the Safe Streets and Communities Act ended house arrest for serious crimes like sexual assault, kidnapping and human trafficking, as well as eliminated pardons for crimes like sexual offences against children.

It also better protects the public from violent young offenders; supports victims of terrorism; and prevents the trafficking, abuse and exploitation of vulnerable immigrants.

Adjournment Proceedings

As hon. members know, this government was elected to implement its promises, and one such promise is to better protect our most vulnerable, including children. Bill C-10 did exactly that, and I am proud to be part of a party that stood in support of this important legislation.

Canadians deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities, and that means keeping dangerous criminals off our streets. We will continue to fight crime and protect Canadians so that our communities are safe places for people to live, raise their families and do business.

• (1935)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, if they want to be tough on crime, then they should be tough on crime. We are not telling them not to be; we are telling them to pay for it. It is not the same thing.

Can they pay for these prisons? They want more people in prison. That is fine. They have a majority. They can do what they want. But can we see some cash? That is what we are saying.

They want to be tough on crime but usually in order to do that, you have to build prisons. They should not be closing prisons; they should be building them. It only makes sense.

Now, what is the government's real agenda?

In my opinion, this government seems more interested in gradually moving toward the privatization of prisons and management of the correctional service, rather than in working to improve the system. That is what I think. I cannot come to any other conclusion given all these prison closures.

Furthermore, in October 2011 and in March 2012, with the greatest of discretion, the government commissioned a study on the different models of privatization in seven western countries, and 10 prisons were examined. A 1,400-page report was produced.

I think that the government may have something up its sleeve.

[*English*]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, it is incredible to me that the hon. member has nothing to substantiate her point that there has been a serious increase in the number of prisoners as a result of the legislation we brought in. In fact, this just has not materialized.

However, I am extremely proud of this government's approach to fighting crime and protecting our communities. It is a made in Canada approach that will increase public safety and restore the confidence of Canadians in our justice system.

The Canadian approach is a balanced one that combines crime prevention, punishment and rehabilitation. Bill C-10 is one piece of this complex puzzle, and our government remains committed to ensuring that crime is prevented, that appropriate rehabilitation takes place and that proper punishments that fit the severity of the crimes are served. That is whom we are targeting, serious and violent repeat offenders.

The people of Canada elected this government because they can count on us to deliver on our communities and to stand up for

victims of crime. It is unfortunate that the hon. members on the other side of this House cannot say the same.

• (1940)

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back in May, I asked the minister about the changes in the budget implementation act that impacted employment insurance. As we now know, these changes have not worked. The minister has already been forced to retract some of those changes.

Sadly, many people are still struggling. I want to ask the minister when she will start improving employment insurance to ensure that those who need it can access it, instead of making it more difficult for those who are out of work to access the funds they have paid into during all of their working years. Hard-working Canadians deserve this much from the government. We need investments in our families struggling to make ends meet.

I had also asked the minister about the gutting of the appeals tribunal for employment insurance. Instead of separate tribunals with dedicated staff, we now have one big tribunal with a fraction of the staff. Asking 70 staff to review over 30,000 appeals will not make the system efficient. It will grind to a halt and the government knows that. The minister shrugged off my question by reiterating that having few people reviewing more cases at the appeals tribunal would be more efficient. Reduced staff cannot review more cases. It is simple math. People now have to wait longer to have their appeals heard. The people asking for appeals have legitimate complaints and are in desperate need.

The facts are clear. The Conservatives have replaced the tripartite system that had appeals judged by a local three-person panel with one representative appointed by the minister, one appointed by the EI commissioner for workers and one appointed by the EI commissioner for employees. This has been replaced with a centralized system in which a small number of full-time referees will review the appeals individually. These changes will result in a loss of sensitivity to local labour market conditions and cultural context. The appellant and his or her legal counsel or representative will no longer have the opportunity to appear in person to present a case. A person behind a desk will review the case and make a decision without ever interacting with the appellant.

With this new system of appeals, the interpersonal face-to-face meeting at which judges can ask specific questions in order to understand the challenges and suffering of an appellant is now eliminated. This will not create better decisions. It will make it more difficult for those making the decisions. They will not have the ability to assess an appellant in person and there will be no opportunity to truly understand the merits of the appeal.

I want to know who the minister consulted on these changes, changes no one thinks are efficient. I want to know why the government thinks creating a backlog is an acceptable cost-saving measure. I also want to know why the government thinks that it is acceptable to leave vulnerable people waiting to hear whether they can receive benefits that they desperately need.

Adjournment Proceedings

I want to know why it is yet again the poorest and the most vulnerable Canadians who must bear the brunt of the government's poorly thought out budget cuts.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will address the issue of how appeals will be made on decisions regarding employment insurance, the Canada pension plan and OAS.

[*Translation*]

Changes to the appeals process should be easy to understand, because the system as it now exists is simply too costly and confusing. We are not against people appealing decisions. What we are against is costly red tape that prevents them from getting timely replies to their appeals.

[*English*]

Beginning in April of next year, the four existing appeal tribunals will be merged into one single decision-making body called the social security tribunal. This means a simple, more efficient single window for Canadians to access appeals and appeals processes, something Canadians are looking for. This will be a single access point for all Canadians wishing to appeal their decisions on any of these three national programs.

The 70 tribunal members will be full-time governor in council appointees solely dedicated to hearing and deciding EI, CPP and OAS appeals. Single-member panels will replace these three previous member panels, significantly reducing costs. This is a significant improvement over the many part-time appointments that previously existed under the old cumbersome tribunal process. The tribunal will use technology to reduce the current paper burden and to speed up the appeals process by using video conferencing instead of in-person appearances, reducing travel costs and costly administrative expenses.

At the end of the day, a savings of \$25 million per year will be realized by this new system. The right to appeal any decision is important but the savings are exceptionally important. We want to save Canadians funds, unlike the NDP which would unnecessarily tax Canadians \$21 billion for a carbon tax if it were given the opportunity.

● (1945)

[*Translation*]

The social security tribunal will improve the way we do business and ensure good service at the lowest possible cost.

[*English*]

The new tribunal will be more accessible, reduce administrative burden and provide greater consistency in decision-making. It will

continue to provide a fair and accessible appeals process for all Canadians.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I see the parliamentary assistant is more interested in perpetuating untruths than listening to what is being said. The government continues to make financial cuts that have the deepest impact on the poor and those on the razor's edge of poverty. It amazes me that the government is balancing the books on the backs of the poor, when it is very clear that the impact on people is horrendous. It can mean the difference between putting supper on the table, having money for medication or paying utility bills.

The changes to EI and the tribunal are kicking people who are already down. It is neither morally responsible nor fiscally responsible. In the end, people living in poverty will cost the economy more in social services, the justice system and the health care system.

All of Canada would benefit by improving EI and having fair and expedient appeals processes. It is about time the government did something that would benefit Canadians rather than constantly berating them and undermining their social good.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, we are seeking to find ways to help Canadians by moving to a simpler, more efficient appeals process.

[*Translation*]

The social security tribunal will streamline the appeals process, so that Canadians do not have to enter a bureaucratic maze to have their cases heard.

[*English*]

This is not about cutting services. It is about working smarter and better. It is about saving the \$25 million a year that was realized in this new system, unlike the NDP, whose choice, if given the opportunity, would be to impose a \$21 billion tax hike on Canadians through a carbon tax.

This change is about improving the way we do business to ensure the top-notch services Canadians expect. We are committed to setting up a tribunal that replaces the current part-time membership with full-time dedicated experts and resources to hear appeals, and reduces the administrative burden, providing greater consistency for decision-making.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:49 p.m.)

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