HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 178 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 7, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 7, 2012

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will have the singing of our national anthem, led today by the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

MONARCHY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today the new $20 bill is going into circulation. The $20 is the most commonly used bill. The Queen's image appears on the new bill not just once, but three times.

To make room for that, whoever designed the new bill got rid of a quote from author Gabrielle Roy and an image of a sculpture by Bill Reid that stands in front of the Canadian embassy in Washington. The sculpture depicts the pride and traditions of the Haida people. I have no problem with the image of the Vimy Memorial being added to a banknote, but why get rid of these important cultural references just to add more images of the Queen?

Is there no limit to this government's obsession with the British monarchy? After all the wild spending on the jubilee, the War of 1812, portraits of the Queen, the "royal" designation for the armed forces and the sharing of diplomatic services, what is next—the return of the Union Jack and "God Save the Queen"?

Gabrielle Roy wrote, "Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?" That is a good question for this Conservative government.

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[*English*]

JOHN CLEARY

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, the province of Ontario and this wonderful country of Canada recently lost a great citizen. John Cleary was born on a farm in Lunenburg, Ontario, on August 31, 1932. John died on October 7, 2012, while living on a farm located just five miles from the very farm where he was born.

John did not move far from his roots but he sure moved mountains. He was first elected as a councillor in Cornwall township in 1972, became the deputy reeve in 1974 and served as reeve from 1976 to 1987. John was elected to the Ontario legislature in 1987 and served until 2003.

I am only one of many who have benefited from John's advice and wisdom. John, along with his ever-supportive wife Elizabeth and his children, served Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry very well.

The best advice John ever gave me is the principle he lived by as an elected official. He said, "Guy, do not ever forget the people who elected you".

Rest in peace, John Cleary.

* * *

RALPH EARL SCOFIELD

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sadly, Windsor lost a truly inspirational man in Ralph "Earl" Scofield who passed away peacefully this past Friday.

Earl was a senator with the Métis Nation of Ontario, a well-respected community leader and a lifetime member of the CanAm Indian Friendship Centre. He was a member of the CCF and a founding member of the NDP. He was also a World War II RCAF veteran who enrolled in the reserve army in 1943 at the age of just 16. He then served as an air gunner pilot, completing 17 missions in Germany and achieving the rank of flight sergeant air gunner.

This past August, Earl was recognized by the Métis Nation of Ontario with the Diamond Jubilee Medal for his contributions of Métis service in the defence of Canada. He was invited to lay a wreath during the 2012 National Remembrance Day ceremony on behalf of the Métis.

He will be deeply missed at our local Remembrance Day service this year, as he was always seated in the front row.

On behalf of the member for Windsor—Tecumseh and I, our thoughts and prayers are with Earl's wife, Mary Rose, and his family.

Earl was a great inspiration to all and a personal hero of mine. His legacy will no doubt inspire future generations.

We thank Earl for his contributions to our country and community. He is already missed but will never be forgotten.

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VETERANS WEEK

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the men and women of Canada's armed forces have served this nation with incomparable dedication. Time and time again, they have stepped forward to take a stand against tyranny and to help restore peace in times of conflict.

They left their towns and cities, their farms and fishing communities to make a difference, and they did: people like Ed Carter-Edwards who flew in Bomber Command and survived Buchenwald; men like Arthur Russell who stormed Red Beach at Dieppe; men who braved the North Atlantic.

Today's men and women in uniform are carrying on that tradition. Whether in the South African war, two world wars, Korea, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, Libya, many peacekeeping and peace support missions, Canadian men and women have answered the call without fail, more than 2.3 million since Confederation.

Sadly, more than 117,000 have given their lives to preserve the freedoms and values we cherish today.

This Veterans Week, it is our duty to remember the sacrifices and achievements of these brave Canadians. The peace and security we continue to enjoy today is their legacy. It is a debt that can never be repaid but it is a debt that can never be forgotten.

Lest we forget.

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● (1410)

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as an honorary Highlander, it gives me great pride to rise in this House today and recognize all Cape Bretoners who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

As most Canadians are aware, Cape Breton has time and time again stepped up to the plate to defend not only our country but free others around the world. Their contribution is well recognized by Cape Breton's 26 local Legions.

In this upcoming weekend, many schools, communities and Legions will pay tribute to our veterans and their sacrifices.

Whether in the army, navy, air force or merchant marines, approximately 50,000 Cape Bretoners put on the uniform to make peace around the world. Many did not come back and those who did come home were wounded both physically and mentally. Thousands are buried in foreign lands, such as Hong Kong, France, Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, South Africa and Korea.

I, along with many, have visited these gravesites that make us proud to be Canadians.

I ask all members in the House to join me in applauding not only the Cape Bretoners but all Canadian soldiers who have fallen battle.

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, our American cousins re-elected President Obama for another four-year term. Canada looks forward to continuing the close co-operation we have had with the Obama administration. In particular, we embrace the opportunity to continue the positive work that has already begun under the beyond the border initiative.

My riding of South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale hosts the busiest border crossings in western Canada and we understand the importance of working together. Making our border more secure, while facilitating the efficient flow of people and goods is critical to the economies of both Canada and the U.S.

Under beyond the border initiative, we have just launched the new shiprider program, allowing for joint maritime border enforcement to crack down on smugglers.

We look forward to closer regulatory co-operation as well, as Canada and the U.S. both work to create jobs and growth in our economies.

Canadians wish the President and the new Congress every success in their next term.

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[*Translation*]

VETERANS WEEK

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Veterans Week, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Jean-Paul Dufour, service number E100677, a resident of the Kénogami district of the City of Saguenay. Mr. Dufour is a World War II veteran and one of the few members of the Fusiliers Mont-Royal regiment to have survived the Normandy landing.

This infantry soldier and prisoner of war deserves our recognition, as do all soldiers who fought to liberate France.

For the sacrifices you made, your courage and bravery, Mr. Dufour, I thank you on behalf of myself, my colleagues, and all Canadians who, to this day, enjoy the freedoms and the democracy that you defended.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you, all veterans and the Canadian Forces.

[*English*]

CANADA-POLAND YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the Canada-Poland youth internship program, CPYIP. This first of a kind bilateral internship exchange allows young Canadians an opportunity to seek an internship in the Polish Sejm and young Poles an opportunity to intern in the Canadian Parliament.

Thanks in large part to the establishment of the Youth Mobility Agreement between Canada and Poland in 2009, the Canada-Poland youth internship program is taking full advantage of the opportunity for youth from both countries to experience each other's respective democratic institutions, further enhancing cultural, economic, diplomatic and political ties.

The first group of interns from Poland, Anna Batowska and Arkadiusz Cygan, arrived in Ottawa in September and have been hard at work during this fall session.

I thank the members and executive of the Canada-Poland Youth Internship Society that oversees the Canadians end of the exchange, the Polish Heritage Foundation, the Canadian Polish Congress, the Polish Embassy and all of the generous donors for making this bilateral internship possible.

I think I speak on behalf of all parliamentarians when I say to the interns, “Welcome and enjoy your stay”.

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RETAIL COUNCIL OF CANADA

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Retail Council of Canada and its members have a proud tradition of serving Canadians. That is not just service at the cash register. It is service that retailers deliver through working with the Government of Canada to develop and implement new policies to the benefit all consumers.

The retail sector is Canada's largest employer, providing jobs for more than two million Canadians. It generates sales in excess of $300 billion per year. The sector directly contributed $74.2 billion to Canada's gross domestic product in 2009.

Retailers are also innovators. The sector invests billions of dollars annually in new machinery and equipment, information and communication technologies, and in new infrastructure and enhanced logistics, all with one goal in mind: to better serve Canadians.

I invite members to join me in welcoming representatives of the RCC and Canada's retailers who are in Ottawa today. Let us thank them for helping to build stronger and more prosperous communities across Canada.

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● (1415)

DIWALI

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Diwali is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the past year, to look ahead and to plan for the future with renewed optimism.

Many people in my riding of Newton—North Delta and all over the world will gather with family and friends to give thanks, to reflect and to celebrate the victory of goodness in all of us.

Diwali, the festival of lights, celebrates hope and inner strength as we welcome the coming new year.

Every Canadian can share in hope for the future. Around the world our multicultural nation is a beacon of hope. We pride ourselves on our openness and we strive to build an inclusive society. However, we are not there yet. We must draw on the good within each of us to increase our understanding of one another. Let us recommit to this goal.

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, happy Diwali, *Diwali aur naya saal mubarak.*

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NATIONAL RAILWAY DAY

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Craigellachie, British Columbia, a marker reads:

> A nebulous dream was a reality; an iron ribbon crossed Canada from sea to sea. Often following the footsteps of early explorers, nearly 3,000 miles of steel rail pushed across vast prairies, cleft lofty mountain passes, twisted through canyons and bridged a thousand streams. Here on November 7, 1885, a plain iron spike welded East to West.

It is my pleasure to stand before the House and celebrate National Railway Day as a way to honour rail's central role in Canada's history and remember those who persevered through Canada's unforgiving climate to build the Canadian Pacific Railway.

While the first crews to work on the CP line were instrumental in uniting Canadians from Atlantic to Pacific, today's rail sector workers are a vital part of making sure that the third largest rail network in the world maintains our access to national and international markets, enabling economic growth and prosperity for all Canadians.

Today we pay tribute to Canada's historic railways and their workforces, which are as much a part of this nation's story and success as the vast steel networks themselves.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have here two articles from *iPolitics* that indicate that there are high levels of harassment in the public service. We are talking here about all types of harassment. Nearly one in three employees claims to be a victim.

These articles make particular reference to cases of sexual harassment reported by female RCMP officers—the allegations that led the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to undertake a study of sexual harassment in federal workplaces. As chair of this committee, I am particularly concerned about the statistics reported by *iPolitics*.

The mandate of Status of Women Canada is to coordinate policy with respect to the status of women and administer related programs. As part of its role, the agency advises other federal departments and agencies on certain issues in order to achieve change where needed. Given this clear mandate, this study on sexual harassment is of the utmost importance.

* * *

[*English*]

COPTIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Bishop Tawadros on being chosen last week as the new Coptic Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and the successor to St. Mark the Apostle.

The Copts of Egypt, an ancient people still resident in their original homeland, are the largest Christian minority in the Middle East but are subjected to escalating violence and persecution. As patriarch, it will fall on Pope-elect Tawadros to provide global leadership at this difficult time and to continue Pope Shenouda's ecumenical work with other apostolic churches and Christian communities.

Such increasing bonds of unity and charity in the face of hostility strengthen their witness to peace and are a source of hope to communities throughout the Middle East facing anti-religious persecution.

I ask that my hon. colleagues join with me today in extending congratulations to the Coptic community in Canada and throughout the world and in wishing the new patriarch well as he prepares for his heavy responsibilities.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the 21st day of the hunger strike of Iranian political prisoner Nasrin Sotoudeh, the face, symbol and embodiment of the human rights struggle in Iran; a leader in the struggle for women's rights amidst the persistent and pervasive assault against women; a leader in the struggle against child executions, while Iran has executed more minors per capita than any other country in the world; and a courageous lawyer for political prisoners, while Iran has imprisoned more than 60 lawyers for their human rights work, until she became a political prisoner herself.

While the international community has focused on the Iranian nuclear threat, the massive state-sanctioned assault on human rights has passed quietly under the international radar screen.

It is our responsibility to stand with the people of Iran, to champion their case and cause, to let them know that the world is watching, that they are not alone, that we stand in solidarity with them, and that their just struggle for human rights and human dignity will prevail.

● (1420)

CANADIAN 4-H COUNCIL

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today in recognition of Show Your 4-H Colours Day. November is national 4-H month and our government is proud to encourage Canadians to wear green today to show their support for the Canadian 4-H Council.

Since 1933, the council has attracted new farmers to agriculture through national and international conferences, exchanges and scholarships that focus on leadership and personal development in youth. Thousands of Canadians, like me and many of my rural colleagues, were given opportunities through 4-H to grow from personal competition. Through its national youth program, 4-H helps develop responsible citizens and confidence in youth as they learn a wide variety of skills through hands-on project work.

Unfortunately, the NDP's plan to impose a carbon tax on Canadians would have a devastating effect on young farmers across Canada, such as those currently doing agriculture programs through 4-H, as it would raise the price of everything and devastate agricultural production in Canada.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the verdict is in. Life under a Conservative government means more fees and less services. We now know the Minister of Finance's claim that cuts will only be felt by back offices is nothing but a fairy tale. In fact, the PBO states that only 15% of Conservative cuts will come from internal services. The other 85% will come from services Canadians rely on.

On top of these deep cuts, Conservatives collected $8 billion in user fees last year alone. Passport fees are up. New Canadians pay more. Even fishermen are being hit by Conservative user fees. While Canadians are still recovering from a devastating recession, Conservatives are kneecapping them with hidden taxes and service cuts.

An $8 billion money grab and reckless service cuts are two examples of the Conservatives' backward thinking. We will vote against that backward logic every single day.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has taken steps to reduce taxes for hard-working families across the country. We have brought in many tax breaks, lowering the price on almost everything.

[*Translation*]

Clearly, our government stands up for Canadian families. Unfortunately, the NDP's tax and spend plan does exactly the opposite. On page 4 of the NDP's platform, we see that the party's plan would force Canadians to pay a $21 billion carbon tax that would drive up the cost of everything

[*English*]

The NDP's hidden carbon tax plan would take money straight from the pockets of Canadians and raise the price of everything. Will the NDP leader stand today and admit that his proposed $21 billion carbon tax would hurt Canadian families from coast to coast to coast?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today in India the Prime Minister said that fear of a "catastrophic event" is holding back the global economy. Just as he did in London a few months ago, the Prime Minister admitted that four years after the 2008 recession, our economy is still in a state of crisis.

Why does the Prime Minister only tell Canadians the truth about our economy when he is travelling abroad? When will Conservatives be straight with Canadians about the challenges facing the economy here at home?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity that I have had since the election in the United States to stand on behalf of the Government of Canada and on behalf of all Canadians to congratulate President Obama on a successful re-election as president of the United States.

With respect to the economy, this government has never said that we are immune from challenges in other parts of the world. However, when it comes to trade, when it comes to low taxes, when it comes to fiscal responsibility, when it comes to effective government policies, no country in the advanced world can compete with the economic leadership of the Prime Minister and especially of the best finance minister in the world.

● (1425)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are still 360,000 more Canadians unemployed today than prior to the recession and that is nothing to brag about.

Last night President Obama was, indeed, re-elected and he receives our full congratulations, but he was elected despite a deeply troubled U.S. economy. As troubled as the American economy is, the IMF is now predicting slower economic growth here in Canada than in the United States. For years, Conservatives have boasted that the Canadian economy was doing not quite as badly as the U.S.

Now that it is clear that the Canadian economy is indeed struggling, even compared to the United States, will Conservatives finally take action?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are pleased with the 820,000 net new jobs that have been created since the summer of 2009. However, let us look at what the managing director of the IMF said about Canada:

> —Canada, a country with one of the strongest financial sectors in the world...can teach the rest of the world about how to build a stronger, safer financial system.

Look at what the secretary general of the OECD said. He said that Canada is well prepared: "You have been better prepared and therefore you've weathered the storm a lot better. You are well prepared now. Your fiscal policy, your monetary policy, your financial system [is] in better shape. And therefore, you are doing better in...the world economy."

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is what the International Monetary Fund had to say today. It predicts that next year, with the exception of the European countries saddled with debt, Canada's economic growth will be the slowest of all developed countries. This is not the NDP saying that; it is the IMF.

In 2008, the Conservatives denied that an economic crisis was looming. Did they learn their lesson? Not at all. Will they continue to believe that they are on an island of stability, when in reality, they are on a sinking ship?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there he goes again talking down the Canadian economy.

Let us look at some other facts. KPMG ranked Canada the most tax-competitive economy among mature markets. *Forbes* magazine ranks Canada as the best place for business to grow and to create jobs. Exports of goods have grown by over $50 billion since 2009. The IMF and the OECD project Canada to have among the strongest growth in the G7. This is good news for Canada. The job is not done. That is why we remain focused on job creation and economic growth to ensure that every single Canadian has the dignity of a job.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to get back to the comments that the Minister of Public Safety made yesterday in response to my question about the troubling case of Ashley Smith. This young woman took her own life while she was detained, because she did not receive proper treatment for her mental illness.

The minister resorted to nonsensical partisan attacks, as though he did not realize that Ashley Smith was herself a victim of a system that cannot properly handle people with mental illness.

Will the minister apologize to the loved ones of Ashley Smith for his inappropriate comments?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear on what I said. This is a very sad case and our thoughts go out to Ms. Smith's family. Some of the behaviour seen in these videos is absolutely unacceptable. Our government has directed Correctional Service Canada to fully co-operate with the coroner's inquest.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not a real apology, but that is probably all he is capable of doing.

The Correctional Investigator of Canada has been investigating the presence of detainees with mental health problems in the corrections system for a long time. The symptoms of mental illness are too often misunderstood in this environment. The investigator is explicitly recommending that a study be done regarding the challenges of providing mental health services, and is recommending the creation of an action plan.

Will the Conservatives implement this recommendation, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has always stood for the rights of victims and has done the right thing in regard to Ashley Smith. Not only did I direct CSC to settle litigation nearly two years ago, but CSC has also now been directed to co-operate fully with the coroner's inquest.

In respect of an action plan, this is something I raised with the provincial ministers over a year ago. As a result of our discussions last week with the Minister of Justice and all of the provincial and territorial ministers, we are in fact examining an action plan to deal with mental illness.

● (1430)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is on the same subject. The coroner's inquest in Ontario only covers the last year in custody.

Is Correctional Service Canada in possession of other videos with respect to the care and treatment of Ashley Smith prior to the period under the jurisdiction of the coroner's inquest? Has anyone in the government seen those videos? Is the government now prepared to make any such videos public?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all of us agree this is very sad tragedy. The appalling actions we all saw on those videos remind us that we can do a lot more for mental health.

The government has done a lot with respect to mental health conditions in our prisons. As a result of this tragic accident, Correctional Service Canada has implemented the following new protocols: a comprehensive mental health strategy; training of more than 8,000 staff; and creating new policies for management and for staff. We have invested nearly $90 million to improve mental health in our prisons.

We have done a lot on mental health and we are prepared to continue to do more.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the member did not answer my question, which was very specific. Is the government in possession of other videos that have not been made public, yes or no? I would like an answer, because it is important to know what the government knows and what it will do with that information. Ontario's coroner will not have the authority to look into it for one year. So we must know whether the government is in possession of other videos.

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was in fact the matter of concern raised with Correctional Service Canada.

Despite the jurisdictional limitations of the coroner, we have indicated that CSC is to co-operate fully with the coroner. If the coroner has need of certain information, the coroner simply can ask or subpoena for that information. I have directed CSC to co-operate.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister who is in charge of Correctional Service Canada either knows or does not know whether there are videos for the period that he knows perfectly well are not covered by the coroner's inquest.

I am asking the minister very directly. If the Government of Canada is really interested in getting to the bottom of this, why not deal with the jurisdictional issues that are still before the coroner because of the objections of some of the contracting physicians? Why not hold a public inquiry that will deal with the entire period under which Ashley Smith was in custody? The facts dealing with her case have to come out.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a coroner's inquest is a public inquiry. Not only does that coroner have jurisdiction in respect of subpoenas, we have directed, insofar as Correctional Service Canada has any relevant information with respect to this matter, it shall be disclosed if the coroner requests it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier this fall, the Conservatives promised to drop their notoriously inflexible attitude. They promised that their new budget implementation bill, which goes beyond a strictly budgetary framework, could be examined by various committees of the House. Despite those nice promises, the Conservatives are doing everything in their power to ensure that the hours of study and the number of witnesses are reduced to a bare minimum.

Why are the Conservatives refusing to hear witnesses and prolong the studies in committee, which have been cut as a result of voting?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, the finance committee has voted, as I understand it, to refer the second budget implementation bill to 10 parliamentary subcommittees, which have expertise in certain areas that are subject to proposed legislation in the bill. That is what the opposition parties have asked. If the opposition parties would like to take some part of the bill out and agree on unanimous consent to pass it today, we would be happy to do so.

● (1435)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' dubious plan to have their monster bill examined by committees is collapsing under the weight of Conservative belligerence. Most committees only have a couple of hours to study hundreds of clauses. Witnesses Conservatives do not like are blocked and accountability is being avoided at all costs. It is now becoming clear that their plan to have committees study these bills was nothing but a sham. Why are they so afraid of basic oversight? What are they trying to hide from Canadians?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to accomplish is simply this: that we implement the job-creating measures that were announced in the budget in March this year, some of which were in the first budget bill and some are in this budget bill. The opposition members are being intransigent. I just returned from a G20 meeting in Mexico City and the world is worried about the situation in Europe and the so-called "fiscal cliff" in the United States, while in the House we have the intransigent opposition to job-creation measures.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are worried about a government that hides the truth from them day after day. The Conservatives withhold basic critical information from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, hide hundreds of measures in an omnibus bill and now Conservative committee members are blocking any real study of their monster budget bill.

We remember the old Reform Party and agreed with it on almost nothing except this. Governments that avoid oversight and accountability are governments that avoid their basic responsibility to Canadians.

What happened to those lofty principles? What happened to you guys?

The Speaker: I will remind the hon. member to address his comments through the Chair, not directly at other colleagues.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, us guys are worried about jobs in Canada. Them guys are not so worried. It matters.

What government can do is control our spending. We are controlling our spending. We can stimulate job creation. We did it in 2009-10. We are doing it again. If the official opposition, the NDP, actually cared about job creation in our country, then it should expedite passing the hiring credit for small business. We know it works. It will affect more than 500,000 businesses in Canada.

[*Translation*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only are they trying to hide their irresponsible budget from Canadians, but they also want to hide how they treat our veterans. The Auditor General has been clear: veterans are having to deal with unacceptable wait times, complicated, poorly defined processes and inadequate benefits. What is even more shocking, however, is that in a rich country like Canada, this government does not even provide veterans in need with a decent funeral service.

Does the minister realize that $3,600 is clearly not enough to pay for a funeral, which actually costs more than twice that amount?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the funeral and burial program provides up to $10,000 to help cover the funeral costs incurred by veterans' families. This program has helped over 10,000 veterans in recent years, since 2006. We are always committed to improving the services we offer to veterans.

Unfortunately, we cannot count on the opposition. One thing is certain: we will not make cuts like the Liberals did.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is failing our veterans and trying to hide it from Canadians. The minister would not even tell the Parliamentary Budget Officer how many jobs would disappear from Veterans Affairs or how veterans' services would be impacted by Conservative cuts. What we do know is that injured Canadian Forces members might have to fight the government in court just to get a fair pension.

When will the Conservatives stop playing these games and help veterans get the services and the pensions they deserve?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are providing our veterans with a hassle-free service. Veterans have asked us to cut red tape. Why is the opposition preventing our veterans from getting their service faster so they can navigate through the Internet through the veterans navigator benefit and get access to their e-book. Why is the opposition preventing our veterans from getting faster service?

● (1440)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my 90-year-old mother who was born in Holland, now living in Richmond, B.C., is very upset that many of her heroes who liberated her, my father and her fellow Dutchmen in the Netherlands may not get a proper funeral and burial service when they pass on. Trust me, Mr. Speaker, you do not want to upset my mom.

Why is the Minister of Veterans Affairs upsetting my mother and why is it that so many veterans in the country cannot get a proper funeral and burial service after the services they gave to us? They liberated Europe. They gave their very best to our country. Will the government now ensure that all veterans in our country get a proper funeral and burial?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I want the member's mother to stay happy about her son, I will not tell her that he voted in the House against the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Steven Blaney:—the war memorial program and the helmets to hardhats. I will not tell her, do not worry.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are only asking for decent funerals for our vets, but the Conservatives do not get it.

[*Translation*]

I will give the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs the time to prepare because I have a question for him.

Yesterday, he said that he has travelled across the country, or to certain parts of the country, for official meetings. Based on the list published by his department, not less than 79% of his trips were within his own province.

We would expect the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to have ventured further afield. Will he now do a better job? Will he be going to Halifax, to the first ministers' meeting?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister was clear: he is working with all his counterparts in Canada to foster Canadian unity.

[*English*]

He believes in a united Canada and in fact all of us believe in a united Canada.

Why do you not help all of us do the work of uniting our country by standing now in your place, after 29 donations to the separatists in Quebec, and declare that you support federalism?

I ask him to please do so.

The Speaker: I will once again remind colleagues to address their comments to the Chair and not directly at one another.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sorry to burst the bubble of the bard of the backbench, but there is nothing patriotic about defending illegal spending and ministers who do not show up to do their job, which brings us to the member for Labrador.

Yesterday we learned that as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs he had only been west of Toronto once. In fact, almost all his ministerial travel is so he can fly home. I do not know if he knows that he works for the Canadian taxpayers and they expect results, but would he stand in the House and tell us when he will come clean with Canadians?

Hon. Peter Penashue (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has a strong relationship with provincial and territorial governments. I meet with counterparts regularly and focus on the strength of the provinces in growing Canada's economy.

New exploration and investments are occurring across Canada and especially in Labrador. In my role as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, I get to share these success stories with people from coast to coast to coast, and I work hard to ensure that all Canadians benefit.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he has not quite earned his limo and driver yet because if he were going to share these stories from coast to coast to coast, he would actually have to go there. Let us now see if he can answer these other questions.

We have one convicted minister, one parliamentary secretary on ice, we have eight in and out charges, we have four convictions. We have a $52,000 conviction. We have the largest voter fraud investigation scandal in Canadian history. We have the minister from Labrador who is being investigated for buying an election. I would like to ask him now to stand again and explain his role.

● (1445)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, his role is to continue to work for a strong and united Canada, and he does that every single day. I cannot believe that the NDP would attack him for spending too much time in the beautiful province of Newfoundland and Labrador. He has served the people from that province with distinction.

The member should not be throwing stones when he lives in a glass house. It is his party that took illegal union money. It is his party that used the tax credit to illegally direct funds to the hard-left Broadbent Institute. Why does he not stand up and explain the conduct of the NDP instead of throwing stones at this hon. member?

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Labrador said he is finally ready to explain, next Tuesday, the long list of irregularities in a campaign that he won by only 79 votes. How will he explain $20,000 in overspending, an interest-free loan from a company run by his brother-in-law, a corporate donation of free air travel, anonymous donations and a corporate gift from a construction company that does business with the government?

Why wait? If he cannot explain to Canadians why his—

The Speaker: Order. There needs to be a bit more order during today's question period.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the minister of transport.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that kind of nasty vitriolic attack is not welcome on the floor of this House.

This is a member who would never dare walk out of the House of Commons and repeat all of the allegations he has just made without evidence. None of those things are proven. In fact, what we can say is proven with regard to that hon. member and his party is that there are $400,000 in outstanding illegal loans that leadership candidates from six years ago have still not paid back and that they have someone sitting on their bench that has been found guilty of illegal robocalls. They are the ones that—

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

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past several days, in response to public outrage over support for the burial of our veterans, the minister bragged that his department did not make any cuts. The blame game is cold comfort for a grieving family struggling to cover the costs of burying our war heroes.

When will the minister act on the two-year old recommendation of his own department and increase funding for funeral and burial costs of our veterans?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the funeral and burial program is provided to veterans in need who are injured, and to their families. Since 2006, we have provided this program to more than 10,000 persons. When we cover the costs of a funeral and burial, it can go up to $10,000.

We are always looking at ways to improve the service we are providing to veterans, just as we did last week with the Royal Canadian Legion, helping our veterans with mental health. We are proud to work with veterans to provide a better life for them.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know all good comedians have what they call a shtick. Yesterday's performance by the human resources minister was a huge laugher, though.

In 2004, when she was first elected, HRDC's annual report showed that 80% of the time people were receiving their EI cheque in 21 days, compared to today, when even after she stretched the standard to 28 days she is still only successful 30% of the time.

Obviously, the minister remains short on facts but chock full of shtick.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are the facts. It was 20% of the time that they were not meeting the standard. That standard was not being met in my riding. The Service Canada people on the ground were telling my constituents that in those days, on average, it was taking at least 10 weeks for residents to get their first EI cheques.

We are improving on that. We have improved it dramatically. Yes, we have a ways to go. That is why we are investing in the modernization of our systems. We are helping people and employers file online because that improves accuracy, improves processing and it will improve the service we provide to Canadians.

* * *

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Conservatives seemed to have trouble understanding their new investment agreement with China, and maybe they should actually read it. Under this agreement, if the CNOOC-Nexen takeover is approved, CNOOC will have the same rights as any Canadian company to buy up new oil leases and expand operations. Let us look at article 6, which states that Chinese state-owned companies will receive national treatment for "expansion, management, conduct, operation and sale..". That is nice and simple.

Have the Conservatives read their own agreement, and do they deny it would give Chinese state-owned companies the same rights as Canadian companies to buy up new oil leases and a whole lot more?

● (1450)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to follow the hon. member's logic. I am having a lot of difficulty with that, I suspect because the question is not logical.

Here is the issue. The issue is this simple. The FIPA will establish rules. Those rules will protect Canadian investors in China. Those rules will treat Chinese investors in Canada the same way as Canadian investors. What is wrong with rules?

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem with rules is that the Conservatives do not seem to be able to manage them effectively, and they have badly mismanaged this file from the start.

Breaking news: now we learn from Canadian Press that the Conservatives have missed a key deadline to examine the impact that the CNOOC-Nexen takeover will have on Canadian national security. How could Conservatives stand up in the House day after day and tell Canadians they are evaluating the CNOOC takeover on the basis of national security, when they dropped the ball and missed the deadline? They broke the rules. This is amateur hour. How could they drop the ball—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government will always act in the best interests of Canadians. What we have to do with this transaction is to see if it will provide a net benefit for Canada.

What matters is to come here and to advocate for national security provisions. When we put them in back in 2009, the NDP voted against that. We also put in guidelines for the SOEs. We have tools to fully scrutinize this transaction, and we will do that very closely.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the government is slow to release KPMG's study on the real cost of the F-35s, Australia's auditor general estimates that these fighter jets will cost more than $131 million each and that after 2019, the cost will increase by $2 million a year.

I want to remind the Conservatives that the report on the cost estimates was due in July. This is November.

I have a simple question. Will the Conservatives abide by their own seven-point plan and issue an update on the cost of the F-35s?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are focused on what the Canadian Auditor General has to say. What he asked for was for that Department of National Defence table updated cost estimates for the F-35. We have gone a step further. We would like those to be independently validated, so we have hired a firm to do that. It is working on that. The work is progressing very well, and those numbers will be tabled in the House of Commons and made public.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the whole world knows that the latest estimate is $130 million each, and rising. Like the Australians, the Conservatives have had this data since last May.

We may now know why the F-35 is so expensive. These planes are magic. We are being told that they will get stealthier as they get older. We thought they were being built by engineers in Texas, but apparently it is wizards in hogwarts. Is that why they will not consider other options, because the Conservatives' secret requirements include magic?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's attitude, but the reality is that the advice given to the government on issues and operational requirements does come from the air force. I do respect their advice, and I do think they are the experts on this matter. We will take their advice under consideration.

In terms of options, the member knows full well that the government will be examining all options to replace the CF-18.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by defeating proposal 6 yesterday, Michigan voters have cleared the way for construction of the Detroit River international crossing. This is good news for travellers, good news for workers and good news for industry, on both sides of the border.

Everyone supports this project, except the NDP.

The mayor of Windsor came to our committee yesterday to show his support. Could the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities update the House on the latest victory for a new public bridge over the Detroit River?

● (1455)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the member for Essex for his hard work on this important file. If only the members opposite did the same and supported this vital project.

We are very pleased to see the support of the people of Michigan for the bridge between Detroit and Windsor, which is very important for the economies of our two countries.

This project is top priority for our government, and we will continue to work with our partners to make it happen as soon as possible.

* * *

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that the Conservatives are quietly slashing services to Canadians. The PBO reports that 85% of Conservative cuts are to front-line staff and to the services that Canadians rely on. Service Canada is already near crisis. One in four EI applications are not being processed on time, and the majority of calls are not getting answered.

How bad do things have to get before the minister will act to protect Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts remain the same. They were found in budget 2012. We have since published quarterly financial reports, public accounts and other means of reporting to Parliament, which clearly indicate that 70% of reductions to this budget are to back-office operations and other non-core essential services that affect Canadians.

That is the promise we made to Canadians. We stand by that promise because we are acting in their interest, unlike the $21 billion carbon tax that the opposition seems fetish like in agreeing with and wanting to impose upon the people of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are cutting old age security, limiting access to employment insurance and making budget cuts at Service Canada. Obviously, we voted against all that. Statistics show that the quality of service has declined. Why? Because of the Conservatives' budget cuts. Service Canada employees are swamped. The Conservatives did not learn their lesson and they are continuing to make cuts.

Will the minister wake up and address the problem with regard to the lack of resources?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong. We are trying to help people find new jobs and give them access to job readiness training. We are improving things. We have already improved service delivery to Canadians and we will continue to do so by helping people find good jobs and acquire the necessary skills.

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are paying the price for the cuts the Conservatives are making at Service Canada. Canadians should not have to wait on the phone for hours to get help. What is more, we know that there will be still more cuts, but the Conservatives are not saying how many people will be laid off. Canadians can be sure that the NDP will never support this.

Why do the Conservatives continue to make cuts to the public service knowing that this has a direct impact on services to Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I already said, the departments provided information to Parliament about their finances in a recent report that is available to the public. Mr. Page's statements have been contradicted by information that clearly shows that operational efficiency is the reason for approximately 70% of the current savings.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, believing that irresponsible cuts can be made without affecting services is wishful thinking.

The Conservatives clearly said that services to the public would not be affected, but in reality, it is impossible to cut departmental budgets without cutting public services. Either the Conservatives do not realize just how far-reaching the effects of their budget cuts are or they just do not care.

Did the minister read the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report? Does she realize that there has been a serious impact on services across the country?

● (1500)

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear: it is possible to reduce funding while protecting services to Canadians.

[*English*]

The opposition has never met a program it does not love. It wants to increase, to over-tax, to over-regulate and to over-spend. That is the opposition's modus operandi.

That is not the way we work. We protect services to Canadians. We will continue to do so, but we will do so in a way that reduces the cost to Canadians because we respect the taxpayer.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the Conservatives, the word of the day seems to be "hogwash". Not only are they cutting services, but they also want to close 10 marine communications and traffic services centres across Canada, including the ones in Rivière-au-Renard and Montreal. Everyone agrees that not only do those centres save lives, but they are essential to risk assessments on environmental issues as well as the protection of recreational boaters, sailors and fishers.

Perhaps the minister did not see this. Why did he go ahead with those cuts, especially without any studies or consultation? What does he have to say to that?

[*English*]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the complete consolidation of the marine rescue sub-centre in Quebec City is planned for next year. As we have said all along, consolidation will be based on operational needs, on the maintenance of public safety and taking the time needed to complete this work properly.

The coast guard intends to maintain its excellent record of safety to mariners.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to put Canadians at risk with cuts to food safety, environmental monitoring and now marine safety.

Fisheries and Oceans is closing almost half of the marine communications and traffic centres across the country, including those in Montreal and Vancouver. These centres monitor marine traffic, and cutting them increases the risk of accidents involving passenger ships or tankers carrying crude oil.

When will the government stop gutting services that protect Canadians' safety and the environment?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Coast Guard is committed to ensuring the safety of mariners and maintaining its current levels of service.

We are investing in the coast guard's infrastructure to take advantage of today's technology to deliver the same services at strategic locations across the country. Better connected centres equipped with modern technology will ensure improved reliability of services.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the Minister of State for Transport that we know that Canada Post is a crown corporation, we know that the employees are unionized and we know that the government gets revenue from it. The thing that gets us is this government's insidious decisions, such as taxing families buying a new home to the tune of $200 for postal service, which is free for everyone else.

When will the Conservatives stop attacking Canada's middle class?

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this member has it all wrong. Our government is committed to universal and economically viable postal services for all Canadians.

As the member has noted, Canada Post operates at arm's length from government. The answer to his question is clear: We expect Canada Post to offer quality services to Canadians while respecting the taxpayer. It is that simple.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear: the Conservatives have decided to further tax the middle class with hidden fees. People in rural areas are already having to cope with reduced hours of service and post office closures. The economy of many of Quebec's communities is suffering for it.

Can the Conservatives tell us whether their new postal tax is part of their plan to help keep regional post offices open?

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, these members do not seem to understand that Canada Post is a crown corporation at arm's length from government. Canada Post is in charge of making operational decisions, day-to-decisions and so forth. That is why we have crown corporations. That is why it is at arm's length.

If there is an additional cost to provide the service, we expect the people who use the service or develop it, like in this case the developers, to absorb that cost. We do not expect taxpayers to subsidize developers.

● (1505)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Battle of Vimy Ridge is an integral part of Canada's history. In April 1917 the Canadian Corps was ordered to Vimy. After four days of fierce battle, the Canadians claimed victory, though it came at a very high price. Of the more than 15,000 Canadians who participated, over 10,000 were either killed or wounded. The victory at Vimy defined Canada as a nation in its own right.

Could the Minister of Veterans Affairs inform the House what our government is doing to keep the memory of Vimy alive?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap for reminding us of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

[*English*]

In April 1917 Canadians from all over the country came together and accomplished what had been thought impossible, the capture of Vimy Ridge. It was the birth of our nation.

This afternoon I was pleased to join the Minister of Finance at the official issuing of the new $20 polymer banknote. This note depicts the magnificent Vimy Memorial in France and honours the ultimate sacrifice of Canada's fallen.

Our government will continue to ensure that the service of our veterans is well remembered.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Cohen commission revealed serious Conservative mismanagement of west coast fisheries right at a time when many salmon stocks are in peril. The Conservatives have weakened fisheries habitat laws, gutted DFO's research capacity and now after spending $26 million on this commission, they are ignoring the commissioner and his advice.

When will the government reverse its devastating changes and commit to implementing the Cohen commission's recommendations? Is the government waiting for the same devastation of salmon stocks it presided over with the cod?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will remind the hon. member and the House that it was this government that commissioned the Cohen report. This is a very expansive report with serious implications for a very important resource to British Columbia and all of Canada. We are going to carefully review the report and the recommendations and work with our stakeholders and partners to take steps to ensure that the salmon fishery in British Columbia is sustainable and prosperous for years to come.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of the Environment and I discussed the fact that the cost of cleaning up one of North America's most toxic sites, Randle Reef in Hamilton Harbour, has been adjusted. He knows that Hamilton city council and local stakeholders have now committed their full one-third of the new adjusted costs.

Will the minister please advise the House if his government is now prepared to commit its full one-third of the adjusted cost so that we can clean up this critically important environmental site?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the recently updated Great Lakes water quality agreement with the United States, Canada renewed its commitment to remediate Randle Reef and other contaminated sites. Our government committed funding in budget 2007, and I am delighted that the city of Hamilton, the Hamilton Port Authority, U.S. Steel Canada and others have now firmed up their share of cleanup funds.

Once the government of Ontario steps up with its one-third share, I will seek the release of committed funds and the authorities to proceed with this long overdue toxic site cleanup.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's ambitious pro-trade plan is opening up new markets like the fast growing economy of Panama. Unbelievably, the members opposite do not seem to mind that Canadian exporters face tariffs of up to 70%. In fact, the member for Malpeque yesterday called our efforts to bring this legislation to a quick vote "absurd" and then stood with his NDP friends to vote against bringing this forward.

Will the parliamentary secretary explain how and why our government is defending Canadian interests with this great agreement?

● (1510)

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 member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex understands that Canadian exporters need to be on a level playing field with their competitors around the world. Sadly, the anti-trade NDP fails to grasp this concept. Canada's exporters can compete and win against the best in the world and agreements like this allow them to do it.

I call on all of the members opposite, including the anti-trade NDP, to join our Conservative Party tonight in voting in favour of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement to help bring real benefits to Canada's exporters.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, the Conference Board of Canada calculated that the cultural sector represented 7.4% of GDP. Artists who contribute to the economy are penalized by the current tax system in years when they earn a decent income.

Will the Conservatives support tax flexibility for Canadian artists by voting for Bill C-427?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not support the bill. We do support the 2012 budget, which is consistent with our election platform.

We are making record investments in Canada's culture. We created two new national museums and the Canada media fund, and we have provided unprecedented levels of funding for the Canada Council for the Arts and our heritage. Our investments in Canada's culture are at an all-time high.

For these reasons, artists from across the country came to Parliament Hill last week to tell all Canadians that the government has kept the promises it made to artists.

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JUSTICE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although there are more and more revelations about the hold that organized crime and the Mafia have over entire sections of the economy—particularly the construction sector—the government is doing nothing. It is acting as though these criminals were not just as detrimental to society as terrorists, even though they corrupt public servants, sell drugs to our youth and orchestrate murders in broad daylight.

Why does the government not create a list of banned criminal groups, like the list of terrorist organizations, in order to limit as much as possible what they can do?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the hon. member has been for the last year.

I appreciate that fighting crime is not much of a priority for what is left of the Bloc, but that being said, we have brought in legislation concerning organized crime, making all murders automatically first degree. We have toughened sentences for gun crimes associated with organized crime, including drive-by shootings. We have eliminated house arrest for certain organized crime offences.

I suggest that if the member wants more, he should just read the bills we have been passing in this Parliament that he has completely missed.

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: On the occasion of Veterans Week, I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of some of our war veterans, namely, Mr. Alfie Bojalil, a peacekeeping veteran; Mr. Arthur Rossel, a Dieppe veteran; and Mr. Ed Carter Edwards, also a World War II veteran.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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 59 petitions.

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[*Translation*]

TRIBUTE TO VETERANS

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the foggy dawn of August 19, 1942, when Europe was under the control of the Nazi regime, 5,000 Canadians landed at Dieppe. Let us talk about one of those veterans.

● (1515)

[*English*]

Arthur Rossel was 22 years old and in a landing craft. He was part of The Essex Scottish Regiment from Windsor and said, "I was a lucky man because when we hit the water, I was supposed to be a bodyguard for the Brigadier-General". It did not turn out that way. As he was trying to save the general, he was seriously wounded. He spent 18 days in a coma and months more in hospital following the raid. Arthur feels that he was lucky.

[*Translation*]

Nine hundred soldiers were not so lucky and fell at Dieppe seventy years ago. Close to 2,000 Canadians were taken prisoner.

A young French nurse, Sister Agnès-Marie, and her nursing colleagues welcomed these injured, maimed and dying soldiers and cared for them day and night with limited means. Soldiers told these nurses that they would free France for them. They told these nurses that they reminded them of the sisters in Quebec. This young French nun, Sister Agnès-Marie, put her own life at risk to care for these soldiers. Through her prayers and her tears, she witnessed the last moments of many soldiers' lives. That is what we are commemorating this week.

This is Veterans' Week, and today we, as parliamentarians, would like to take a few moments to pay tribute to veterans.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their presence here and tell them that Arthur returned to Dieppe 70 years later and received a hero's welcome. Arthur told us that he signed more autographs than ever this year because the people of Dieppe remembered the sacrifices and courage of Canadian soldiers. Arthur returned to Dieppe for a very simple reason: he wanted to pay tribute to his comrades who were not as lucky as he was and who never returned home.

Sister Agnès-Marie, the same nun from 70 years ago, was also there that year. She is 98 years old and she said that we must never forget the lasting scars left by these brutal massacres. She added, "They were fathers, husbands and brothers, young and old, before being dragged into a world war that altered the course of their existence. Alas, some did not even have the chance to experience the pleasures of life before going to war. Thrown into a dangerous raid, they were sadly unable to meet their objective, but they found their way to a blessed eternity."

I believe that Canada should thank Arthur and the veterans of Dieppe for risking their lives for our democracy. Thank you so much, Arthur.

[*English*]

On the ground and in the sky, the battle went on during the Second World War. The efforts of approximately 50,000 Canadians who served with the Royal Canadian Air Force in Bomber Command operations over occupied Europe was one of our country's most significant contributions during the Second World War.

Ed Carter Edwards was one of them. In 1942, Ed enlisted and joined the sixth Royal Canadian Air Force group. He flew 21 successful missions as a wireless operator air gunner, but, unfortunately, he was shot down over France in 1944. He first made contact with the French resistance but then fell into the hands of the Gestapo. He was betrayed and ended up in a Buchenwald concentration camp. There he saw the atrocities of war. Luckily, the German airmen took him to a prisoner-of-war camp so he could escape.

He finally made his great journey with his son Justin. We are very proud, Mr. Speaker, that you were able to recognize Ed Carter Edwards today.

We can be so proud, as all parliamentarians can be so proud, of what our great veterans have accomplished. Their legacy goes on in Korea where we will be commemorating the 60th anniversary next year. It also goes on in our peacekeeping and NATO missions. It goes on in Bosnia. Canada and other peacekeeping nations faced huge challenges in the Balkans, and there was only so much they could do to curb the worst of the violence brought on by the hatred and viciousness of the combatants there. Many horrible acts were perpetrated that the peacekeepers simply could not prevent.

In 1992, Alfie Bojalil gained recognition and was awarded the commander-in-chief commendation for his participation in this effort. He was in the besieged city of Sarajevo. He returned on his own this year. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for recognizing Alfie Bojalil as one of our NATO and UN veterans and others for what they are giving us and what they are doing for our country.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

But some never come back. On September 6, 2009, a few weeks before the end of the second mission in Afghanistan, Major Yannick Pépin lost his life when his armoured vehicle struck an improvised explosive device. I went to the funeral, where I met his wife, Annie Roberge, and their children. Today, she is courageously moving on with her life.

Today, we talked about Vimy.

[*English*]

Madison Ford has not been in a war. She is 16 years old and she is in one of my colleague's riding. She is a student at Bear Creek Secondary School in Barrie, Ontario. She travelled, along with 5,000 students, to the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge this past April, and she wrote, “These soldiers gave their lives for our freedom. These brave soldiers gave Canada its identity of “the true north, strong and free”.

I was listening to her and I kind of envied her because I felt that she was speaking like the Minister of Veterans Affairs. However, the good thing is that the youth understand that not only was Vimy the birth of a nation, but when our youth go to Vimy, it is the birth of a new generation.

Madison is asking us one thing during Veterans Week. She asks, “Please take a moment to acknowledge the bravery and heroism of the veterans that are with us today. Thank you for your service and risking your life for me. Let us together listen to the final prayer of those sacrifices we are honouring. We may hear them say softly: 'I love my family, I love my comrades, I love my country and I will defend their freedom to the end'”.

I thank Madison for the great words she has written.

We can see that this is the Canadian journey. It has begun in many conflicts. We have seen Arthur in Dieppe. We have seen Ed in Bomber Command. We have seen Alfie in Bosnia, and we are still seeing our great soldiers in Afghanistan today.

We can say today, with hope, because Madison is reminding us that these youth care for our veterans. In the famous words of John McCrae:

> To you from failing hands we throw
> The torch; be yours to hold it high.
> If ye break faith with us who die
> We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
> In Flanders fields.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I personally want to thank the Minister of Veterans Affairs on behalf of the official opposition for a very fine speech and kind words to Canada's veterans and the heroes of our nation.

I would like to share with members some of the names of so many of our heroes, over two and a half million Canadians, who donned the uniform of Canada: people like William Hall, an African Nova Scotian who received the Victoria Cross in Lucknow, India; John MacRae who served in the Boer War and in World War I and who gave us that famous poem *In Flanders Fields*; Smokey Smith from British Columbia who fought bravely in Italy and earned the Victoria Cross; and Tommy Prince, a brave first nations aboriginal with the Devil's Brigade in World War II. We must not forget that the first nations people in Canada were exempt from going to war but they went anyway to serve their country.

There are people like Jack Ford of Newfoundland and Labrador, the last surviving individual from the Nagasaki nuclear bombing. He was in the shipyards at the time and if it were not for the hole that he was in he would not have survived. He is a brave hero from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Who could forget August 9, 1974, that terrible tragedy where nine Canadian peacekeepers were killed over Syria when a missile brought down their Canadian Forces Buffalo aircraft? August 9, 1974 is etched in the memory of all our peacekeepers for their brave service in peacekeeping missions around the world.

Ed Carter-Edwards, my personal friend from Ontario, served so bravely with the air force. Unfortunately, he was betrayed and was brought into the Buchenwald war camp. He survived and is still with us today. It is an honour that he is with us to share his story of what happened. Ed Carter-Edwards and many others of that generation deserve our undying gratitude for the tremendous work that they have done and the sacrifice they have made for our country.

I also cannot forget one of the bravest people I have ever read about, Captain Nichola Goddard. She bravely gave her life in Afghanistan for the peace, freedom and democratic principles that we hold so dearly so that the great people of Afghanistan could have what we have in Canada. Unfortunately, she gave up her life for those principles, but she did it so bravely. She would be honoured to know that she was the first woman killed in combat from Canada.

The reality is that she, like all other women who have served our country over the years, is a shining example of what happens when Canadians are willing to put their life forward so that we in this country can maintain the principles of peace, freedom and democracy and share those democratic principles around the world. I know for a fact that when Canadian soldiers, peacekeepers and veterans go around the world there are people in other countries looking up to our brave Canadian heroes and imagining what kind of country they come from.

What kind of individuals lie about their age, get into a uniform and sacrifice their young life in the fields of Europe or elsewhere? I will tell the world that those people are Canadians who sacrificed so much so that people like my family from the Netherlands could be free. The Netherlands today is a prosperous democratic country. Why is that? It is because Canada and her allies, the Polish brigades, the Americans, the British and many others went over there to fight against tyranny so that people like my family could be free. As my father said, “If they have a military like that, imagine what kind of country they come from”.

I am very proud as a Dutch-born Canadian to call Canada my home. I am very proud of the fact that over 5,700 Canadians paid the ultimate sacrifice and are buried in the soil of the Netherlands so that many of us could be free.

The sacrifices do not stop here. Many Canadians in uniform are serving around the world showing the world what it can be when one lives in a country of peace, freedom and democracy and the principles of the rule of law. This is what the men and women who wear the uniform do day in and day out.

I also pay a special tribute to the RCMP officers, firefighters, police officers and those people who serve our country internally to protect our citizens on a daily basis. These are the true heroes of our nation. Even though Remembrance Day comes but once a year, for those people who serve our country, Remembrance Day is every day for them and their families.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning, let us say, "We will remember them and god bless all their memories".

● (1525)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is said that only a soldier can bear true witness to the nature of war and conflict. This is as true today as it was 95 years ago. For many of us in the chamber today, war and conflict are perhaps intangible concepts. As time passes and we lose more and more of our living links to those wars and conflicts of the past, our understanding will rely more on those stories passed from generation to generation, from family to family, as well as the stories captured in the recordings of our history books and the writings and poems of soldiers.

The First World War arose out of a series of complicated alliances, brewing tensions, efforts to maintain declining empires and the protection of territory and of commerce. It is telling that the killing of an archduke should trigger so much destruction and the death of millions of our fellow human beings. Valour and honour resided in those young men who took up arms and gave of themselves in the service of their country.

In his famous poem, Jorge Luis Borges laid out the sentiment in great clarity when he wrote:

> It was their luck to be born into a strange time.
> The planet had been parceled out among various countries, each one provided with loyalties, cherished memories, with a past undoubtedly heroic, with rights, with wrongs, with a particular mythology, with bronze forefathers, with anniversaries, with demagogues and symbols.
> This arbitrary division was favorable for wars.

It is true that in the early part of the last century young Canadians left their homes, saying goodbye to moms and dads, saying goodbye to perhaps a lover or a wife. They were off to war. Some signed up for service, for duty and for adventure. What they confronted was anything but an adventure, but they were duty bound. They lived in rain-soaked trenches, endured the bitter cold of winter and every day confronted the possibility of their own deaths. They lived in conditions we could never fully comprehend.

They did all this in the service of their country and far too many shed blood for us. Therefore, today we remember Vimy Ridge. We remember Passchendaele. We remember Dieppe. We remember the Battle of the Atlantic. We remember all the battles from Kapyong to Kandahar. However, we should not glorify or revel in war, for to do so would bring dishonour to those who sacrificed so much. The young men who entered the call to fight, who took up arms in a cause greater than themselves, would have no doubt preferred peace over war.

I hope the House will allow me at this time to pay tribute to the profound role, and I would say the decisive role, women have played in the war effort. In August of 1914, life changed for Canadian women. It was a period when women were often relegated to their homes, cleaning the house and tending to their children. In the midst of the war overseas Canadian women got to work, literally. With so many of our young men overseas there was a significant void in the labour market. There were jobs to be done. In response, women worked in munitions factories, they became nurses, they worked in our shipyards and they still managed to raise their children. They too were heroes. They too sacrificed much. We remember their service to Canada and beyond and for paving the way for countless young women who followed.

I want to close by acknowledging one such woman. Nichola Goddard was the first female Canadian combat solider ever to be killed in action. She was a brave woman. She was strong in spirit. She loved her family. She loved her husband and she loved her country.

Nichola Goddard was born in Papua New Guinea, the daughter of British and Canadian parents, parents whose love of education and adventure led them to teaching in places all over Canada and eventually to Charlottetown.

● (1530)

It also provided Captain Goddard the opportunity to spend much of her childhood living in places like Black Lake and Lac La Ronge in Saskatchewan. She attended junior high in Edmonton and high school in Antigonish. She went to the Royal Military College in Kingston. She became a soldier, rising quickly to the rank of captain. She served with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and her parent unit, the 1st Regiment Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.

Captain Goddard arrived in Afghanistan in January 2006, and on May 17, 2006, she died. Captain Goddard was standing in the turret of her light armoured vehicle, when it was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade early in the battle. She died instantly. She left behind much that day. She left behind a mom and dad, devastated by the loss of their daughter. A mom, a dad, a husband, siblings, all left with a range of emotions but enormously proud of her bravery and dedication in the service of others.

Today, as on other days, we remember Nichola Goddard and all the men and women who served their country and paid the ultimate price.

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

Lest we forget.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the minister for asking the government to allow the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party to pay tribute to our veterans on this solemn occasion.

Today, we are taking time to mark Veterans Week. It is important to commemorate the men and women who fought and those who never came home to their families.

World War I ended on November 11, 1918. Canadian and Quebec soldiers had participated in one of the most devastating conflicts Europe had ever seen. Many took part, and too many died. After the armistice was signed, Canada decided to designate a day for remembering the soldiers who fell at the front.

Ever since, we have paused on this date to remember our armed forces. Everyone in this House knows the difficulties they must overcome and the efforts they make. They accept the most perilous of missions without flinching. Their only reward is the appreciation and gratitude of their fellow citizens and the immortal memory that is kept alive in our words and our hearts. When we gather each year to honour the memory of the fallen, it is our way of saying a collective thank you. Thank you for your sacrifices. Thank you for your devotion to duty.

The people themselves make this very clear. One need only look, year after year, at the younger generations that take the time on November 11 to remember all that the veterans did. Some people travel to attend ceremonies and parades. Others wear the poppy. But all remember.

How can we forget the courage and valour of the women and men who donned the uniform and risked their lives for their missions? They are the ones who went to the front to defend the values on which our societies are based. When we talk about democracy, liberty and equality, these soldiers endured everything to ensure that those fundamental values are respected.

Human solidarity is on display whenever the time comes to help other people in their struggle to gain and preserve liberty and respect for basic human rights. Canadian soldiers are on the front lines defending these values, and we should never forget it. They accept all their missions with humility, determination and courage. We have a collective duty to remember that.

We remember, too, the men and women who took part in these conflicts out of uniform. We also remember the fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and friends of these soldiers. We remember the families afflicted by the loss of one of their loved ones. This day is especially important to them, and we should underscore their sacrifice.

We remember our soldiers' determination to accomplish their mission, restore the peace, and secure areas in order to help the civilians living there. Present and future generations are all indebted to our veterans. They are the ones who sacrificed so that we can live with our families in a world of peace and freedom.

This Veterans Week, the members of the Bloc Québécois are joining the other members of the House to say that we remember.

● (1540)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It seems the House is accepting of the fact that we are extending the opportunity to comment under ministers' statements today also to the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin by saying a particular thank you, as my colleague from the Bloc has done, for this occasion for the smaller parties to join in today in a non-partisan sense. For that I thank particularly the minister and the government House leader whom I understand is largely responsible.

[*Translation*]

November 11 is a day to remember all of the soldiers who died knowing that they had been sent to the front lines to protect our freedom. We owe our respect and gratitude to the men and women of the armed forces who made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives to this noble cause. November 11 is an opportunity for Canadians to remember.

We remember those who gave their lives. We remember the shattered lives of the soldiers who returned from the war wounded in body and spirit.

[*English*]

My father was one of the veterans of the Second World War. He grew up in London during the blitz. I think he saw more death and destruction before joining the army than once he was in uniform. It was in going to war that my father became a pacifist.

We recognize the sacrifice of so many who have gone into peacekeeping missions, into armed conflict, selflessly. There is no greater example of selflessness than people who give their lives for a larger cause and we always say that their lives must not be in vain, but in doing so, we need to commit to greater efforts to avoid war, to avoid conflict.

We have mentioned many war heroes today in this chamber. I will not take long to mention a few more names, those who have sacrificed so much in war, have come back home to Canada and have had to continue to fight on behalf of other veterans.

I would like to particularly recognize Lieutenant Louise Richard, co-founder of Gulf War Veterans Association of Canada who, together with Captain Sean Bruyea, did so much to defend and help other veterans; Colonel Pat Stogran, who did so much as an ombudsman; and Corporal Dennis Manuge, whose recent effort selflessly helped so many.

I want to thank again the Minister of Veterans Affairs for putting the matter to rest after Corporal Manuge's efforts in court.

We recognize on November 11 the great sacrifices in war time, sacrifices not only of individual soldiers, but of those who love them, those who lost them, those who welcome them home with open arms. We remember on November 11 that many have given their lives for the life that we enjoy today.

On November 11, we remember with gratitude. On November 11, we remember and pray that war will be no more.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I invite hon. members to rise and observe two minutes of silence to commemorate our veterans.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

* * *

● (1545)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in relation to Bill C-27, entitled "First Nations Financial Transparency Act". The committee has studied the report and has decided to make amendments to this report. Therefore, I report the bill back to the House with amendments.

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food, regarding Bill S-11, Safe Food for Canadians Act.

[*English*]

The committee has studied the bill and has agreed to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in relation to its study on the role of the private sector in achieving Canada's international development interest. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-464, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (parental leave for multiple births or adoptions).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce my bill concerning parental leave for multiple births or adoptions. As some of you already know, I am the proud mother of a little boy, and this has led me to research the challenges faced by Canadian parents. I discovered that parents of twins or triplets face even greater challenges, not just because their daily lives are more complicated, but also because the law puts them at a disadvantage.

Parents who have twins or triplets only have 35 weeks of parental leave, the same amount as parents who have one child. However, welcoming multiple children at a time into their lives is not the same as welcoming one.

My bill would help these families by providing them with more leave, up to 72 weeks. The sole purpose of this bill is to help Canadian families, and I am certain that my colleagues from the other parties will support my bill as they care about the physical, mental and financial health of their constituents.

I would like to thank Ms. Kimberley Weatherall, of Multiple Births Canada, an association that has been working for several years advocating for the rights of parents of twins and triplets, as well as Mr. Christian Martin, who is the proud father of twin girls and who appealed to the Federal Court to be eligible for the same parental leave as his wife. Ms. Weatherall and Mr. Martin have supported my efforts in this regard, and I would like to thank them for their assistance.

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

● (1550)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I will be seeking unanimous consent in a moment for a motion that we believe would accomplish a reasonable compromise on a bill that has been sitting, without being called by the government, since February 17 of this year, more than nine months. It is Bill C-32, an act to amend the Civil Marriage Act. The government has chosen not to call the legislation for all this time. We need to balance the expediency of having this legislation finally passed through the House, not only for a royal recommendation but also to ensure that the bill has appropriate time to be studied.

I seek unanimous consent for the motion, which reads as follows: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-32, an act to amend the Civil Marriage Act, be disposed of at all stages as follows: not more than one sitting day shall be allotted for the consideration at second reading; if the bill is not reported back on the fifth sitting day after the bill is disposed of at second reading, during routine proceedings, it shall be deemed to have been reported from the committee without amendment; upon being reported from the committee, the bill shall be deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. opposition House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the proposal of the New Democratic Party House leader for his first time allocation motion. I welcome him to the club, having proposed the allocation of time for debate on an item in the House.

We actually have a better idea to speed this up, and the other parties are aware of this. I propose the following motion, which would ensure that the bill gets to the Senate today: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, Bill C-32, an act to amend the Civil Marriage Act, shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third and passed.

By adopting this motion, the bill would proceed to the Senate today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition today from some constituents in my riding of Leeds—Grenville. The petitioners call upon the government to support Bill C-442, the national Lyme disease strategy act.

ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table four separate petitions in the House today with hundreds of signatures all addressing the same pressing issue, the need for the House to adopt Bill C-398 on an urgent basis so as to facilitate the immediate and sustainable flow of lifesaving generic medicines to developing countries.

As members will recall, an earlier iteration of the bill was brought forward by my former colleague Judy Wasylycia-Leis, and although it passed in the democratically elected House of Commons, it died in the unelected Senate. Frankly, it was a disgrace.

As the petitioners remind us, in sub-Saharan Africa grandmothers are burying their adult children and caring for many of the 15 million children who have been left orphaned by treatable diseases such as HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria.

We have the ability to help. There is no cost to taxpayers. Let us get the job done.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three more petitions to file today, all of them signed by people all across the province of Saskatchewan. In one petition they come from southwestern Saskatchewan, Golden Prairie, Maple Creek, Fox Valley and various other locations, then from Neilburg and in the Battleford area of Saskatchewan.

A second petition, again on the same subject, is from people around Chaplin, Saskatchewan, Mortlach, Parkbeg and various other communities, as well as Cupar, Southey and Earl Grey.

A third petition is signed by people in the Oxbow area, Glen Ewan, Alameda, Carnduff and various other locations in Saskatchewan, Aneroid and Ponteix among them.

All these petitioners draw attention to the fact that the government has cut funding for the prairie shelterbelt program and is in the process of selling off the historic tree farm at Indian Head, Saskatchewan.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to maintain funding for the prairie shelterbelt program and specifically to maintain adequate financial support for the tree farm at Indian Head, which has been an integral part of prairie agriculture since 1901.

● (1555)

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to present a petition to the House of Commons from my riding of South Shore—St. Margaret's, primarily from the Hubbards-Black Point-St. Margaret's Bay area of the riding.

The petition is on the financial support for the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace.

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to present a petition signed by people in my riding calling on the House of Commons to pass Bill C-400 to adopt a national housing strategy.

[*English*]

ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from constituents concerning Canada's Access to Medicines Regime. The petitioners are in support of Bill C-393.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and present a petition from 56 people, most of whom are from my riding of Halifax West, but some also from the remainder of Halifax and from the province of Quebec.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to recognize the importance of the Environmental Lakes Area to the Government of Canada's mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems, 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. I thank them for this petition.

[*Translation*]

GATINEAU PARK

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition that underscores the importance of protecting Gatineau Park. This petition has been signed by Canadians from coast to coast, from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia. The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to "adopt legislation giving the Gatineau Park the necessary legal protection to ensure its preservation for future generations".

In other words, what the petitioners are telling us is that Gatineau Park is a Canadian treasure that must be protected as of today.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. The first petition is from residents in the area around Vancouver and Burnaby.

The petitioners call on the House to put forward a permanent legislated moratorium and ban on crude oil tankers on the British Columbia coast.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of Ontario, British Columbia and also in and around my riding.

The petitioners call upon the House to step up and find some way to avoid the ratification of the Canada-China investment treaty. We know that it no longer is before the House, having been tabled for 21 days without debate. The petitioners call on the House and members herein to find a way to stop ratification.

[*Translation*]

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition in support of Development and Peace. The petition calls on the government to finally achieve its target of 0.7% of Canada's GDP for official development assistance and to restore the $49.2 million in funding for the next five years to Development and Peace, a major development organization.

● (1600)

ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions. The first petition is in support of Bill C-398 to reform Canada's access to medicines regime to facilitate the immediate and sustainable flow of generic medicines to developing countries. This could save millions of lives.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes to us from Development and Peace, which is calling on the government to honour its international commitment to dedicate 0.7% of GDP to development assistance.

[*English*]

SHARK FINNING

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. The first petition is signed by thousands of Canadians. They call on the House of Commons to ban the possession, trade, distribution or offer for sale of shark fins in Canada, understood to be the raw, dried or otherwise processed attached fin or tail of any species of shark. Due to the over-fishing of sharks and shark fins and sharks' slow reproductive rates, the decline in shark numbers has upset the ocean ecosystem.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the other petition has also been signed by thousands of Canadians. They call on the House to save the ELA, Canada's leading freshwater research station. They call on the House to recognize the importance of the ELA to the Government of Canada's mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems. The petitioners ask that the government reverse its decision to close the ELA research station and to continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at current or higher levels of commitment.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present petitions signed by my constituents from communities like South Indian Lake, Norway House, Wabowden, Easterville, Cross Lake, Berens River, the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Grand Rapids, Bloodvein and Nelson House.

These Canadians are living in communities that depend on seasonal industries, aboriginal communities that are very concerned about the changes made by the government to EI for seasonal workers. These community members and seasonal workers are asking the federal government to reverse its position and maintain full EI coverage for seasonal workers. It is my honour to share their voices in the House of Commons.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 894.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 894—**Mr. François Choquette**:

With regard to VIA Rail passengers with reduced mobility: (*a*) how many anchoring mechanisms are currently installed per railway car to accommodate persons with reduced mobility; (*b*) does VIA Rail have a policy on accommodating people with reduced mobility and, if so, what is it; (*c*) does VIA Rail keep a file concerning accessibility requests for persons with reduced mobility and, if so, how many requests does it receive on average per (i) day, (ii) week, (iii) month, (iv) year; (*d*) how many accessibility requests for persons with reduced mobility have been received over the past five years; (*e*) how many complaints has VIA Rail received concerning accessibility for persons with reduced mobility over the past five years; (*f*) what were the grounds for the complaints to VIA Rail concerning persons with reduced mobility, did VIA Rail take concrete measures to correct the situation and, if so, what were they; (*g*) what changes does VIA Rail plan to make to its facilities to accommodate groups with more than two travellers with reduced mobility; (*h*) what is the estimated cost of modifying a railway car to accommodate more than one person with reduced mobility; and (*i*) are data available on the accessibility of VIA Rail trains for people with reduced mobility compared to other passenger trains elsewhere in the world and, if the data show differences in accessibility, why hasn't something been done to address these differences?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), there is one anchoring mechanism, wheelchair tie-down, used to accommodate persons who are confined to a wheelchair installed in 86 railway cars used by VIA Rail Canada.

In response to (b), VIA's policy is that customers with special needs will be treated with the same dignity, respect and care as those who do not require special attention. This policy applies to all types of persons with disabilities, be it physical or mental, permanent or temporary, including children and those travelling on a rail pass. A special service request is added to the passenger reservation file to ensure the file is queued to the appropriate agent, who will make necessary arrangements and confirm available services. Special service requests must be made at least 24 hours in advance, 48 hours in cases of special meals, electric adaptors, stretchers and special stops. All VIA trains are accessible to travelers in wheelchairs and are equipped with wheelchair tie-downs, narrow wheelchairs, tools to reduce the width of certain manual wheelchairs, and grab bars in washrooms. The availability of these services varies according to the train equipment in use. Please see following link for more info: http://www.viarail.ca/en/useful-info/special-needs/reduced-mobility.

Regarding (c) and (d), there is no file or report concerning accessibility requests for persons with reduced mobility. In response to (e), VIA received 101 complaints over the 2008 to 2012 period.

In response to (f), of the 101 complaints received over the five-year period, 47 pertained to on train services related issues, 50 pertained to station services and four to reservations. In response to (f) (i) and (ii), yes, VIA Rail responded to every customer complaint by telephone or by email and followed up where appropriate. This involved in many situations informing and/or reviewing the customer level of service provided by VIA Rail and options available. In other situations the complaints were reviewed and discussed with the activity groups involved with employee follow-up involving assistance related issues.

In response to (g), requests by persons with reduced mobility are handled by VIA Rail's telephone sales office and travel options are determined based on the group's travel needs and mobility restrictions as well as the train equipment type and accommodations available. For example, personal manual wheelchairs that are collapsible can be stored in the baggage rack within a passenger rail car while electric wheelchairs can either be accommodated in the assigned wheelchair tie-down or transported in the baggage car where assigned. VIA's current plans in regard to accessible transportation pertain to the installation of an improved redesigned wheelchair tie-down and accessible washroom in its Renaissance and LRC equipment, Head End Power, HEP 1 sleepers.

Regarding (h) and (i), Via Rail Inc. does not have this information.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question Nos. 895 and 898 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 895—**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc**:

What is the total amount of government funding, for each of fiscal years 2010 and 2011, allocated within the constituency of LaSalle—Émard, specifying the department or agency, initiative, and amount?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 898—**Mr. Massimo Pacetti**:

With regard to government communications: (*a*) what is the (i) headline or subject line, (ii) date, (iii) file or code-number, (iv) subject-matter of each press release which contains the phrase "Harper government" issued by each government department, agency, office, Crown corporation, or other government body since May 1, 2012; (*b*) for each such press release, was it distributed (i) on the web site of the issuing department, agency, office, Crown corporation, or other government body, (ii) on Marketwire, (iii) on Canada Newswire, (iv) on any other commercial wire or distribution service, specifying which such service; and (*c*) for each press release distributed by a commercial wire or distribution service mentioned in (*b*)(ii) through (*b*)(iv), what was the cost of using that service?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statements, government orders will be extended by 29 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA-PANAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed from November 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to share my comments on a bill that should have been passed two and a half years ago. We are in the eleventh hour of debate on this bill, which is certainly not being rammed through. It should have been passed long ago.

We are a trading nation, as most members of the House and Canadians know. It is something to see the magnitude of trade that we do in Canada as we look at what has happened over our history. Eighty-five per cent of our trade has been with our southern neighbour, the United States.

Here I want to take the opportunity to congratulate President Obama for his win last evening and the people of Michigan for their decision to allow the new bridge to be built between Windsor and Detroit. The existing bridge is the largest trading bridge anywhere in the world. At times there is $2 billion a day in trade going across that bridge, so it is very important that a new bridge be built.

As I said, about 85% of our international trade has been with the United States, whereas last year it was about 73%. We are becoming less dependent on the United States and more dependent on other markets, such as the one we are debating under this piece of legislation, Panama's.

It is impressive to see the number of jobs created because of our international trade. One in every five Canadian jobs is generated through exports and 63% of our country's annual GDP is created because of international trade. Therefore, it is very important that we get this piece of legislation through. Panama is the hub of the Americas and a very important logistical platform for us to trade with in Central America.

This is a continuation of an agenda that our government has had since coming into office. We have signed nine different free trade agreements, including with countries such as Colombia, Jordan, Peru and Honduras; and with the European Free Trade Association, including Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. This is long overdue. We are very aggressively pursuing other countries with regard to free trade agreements, seen in the Canada-European Union free trade agreement, for example. We look forward to the final text perhaps being out before year end.

I was with the trade committee in Japan last week and was very encouraged by what we heard regarding a bilateral trade agreement with Japan, the world's third largest economy.

When we add all of these up and see exactly what we are doing, the possibilities of moving forward on our trade agenda are very encouraging.

Just to look at what we have done with NAFTA and the United States, since NAFTA was signed some 18 or so years ago, that agreement has created about 40 million jobs. The GDP of the three countries was a little over $7 trillion at the time of signing and is now over $17 trillion now. Between the three countries, we are now trading almost $1 trillion a year. It is very significant.

Canadians realize the importance of a trade agenda. What I cannot understand is where the opposition is at with regard to our trade agenda. Even today, opposition members say that they do not like and would get rid of the NAFTA agreement. They say they would never support it and never have supported it. It does not matter what kind of logic we use or what kind of math we put in front of them to show them the benefits of it, they disagree with it. This is something that I absolutely do not understand.

The opposition members have disagreed with all of the nine free trade agreements our government has signed, except maybe the one with Jordan, which they could not come to a decision on. They had to sit on their hands because they did not want to show that they were somewhat supportive of that agreement. When we look at the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, I would suggest that it is much more beneficial even than the agreement with Jordan. Yet the opposition filibusters and accuses the government of trying to ram it through.

● (1605)

There has been a lot of debate on the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, and it is amazing what is in that piece of legislation and what it will do for our agriculture sector. Agriculture is near and dear to my heart, as we farm about 3,000 acres of canola and wheat. It is important for us to understand the size of agriculture in Canada. The agrifood sector actually generates 8% of our GDP. It creates one in eight jobs in this country. That is 2.2 million jobs in Canada created because of agriculture. There is some $41 billion created because of trade in our agricultural products in international markets. Almost half of our total agricultural production in this country goes to international trade. Indeed, we are sixth largest exporter of agricultural products in the world.

It is very important that we make sure that we capture as many possible markets as we can for our agricultural products. Panama is the second largest market for agricultural products in Central America. This piece of legislation would allow agriculture not only to be enhanced but also for it to be done in a tariff-free way. How many tariffs are there? On the signing and implementation of this piece of legislation, 78% of Canadian agricultural exports to Panama would be tariff-free .

What are those products? The 20% tariff on frozen french fries, which help Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Canadians, would be eliminated. How about the pulse crops of the Prairies? There is a 15% tariff on those that would be eliminated immediately upon signing of this agreement. How about malt exporters, the barley growers of this country? The 10% tariff applying to them would be eliminated upon signing of this agreement.

By the way, the opposition disagrees with our getting rid of these tariffs and has fought this for two and a half years in the House. That is absolutely ridiculous when we see the benefits to these areas.

How about our beef sector, which has been plagued by the BSE crisis and all kinds of problems, including its exports to different countries around the world being shut down as a result? The producers have gone through a very difficult time. The tariff they face in the Panamanian region is 25% to 30%. That would be eliminated.

I was in Japan last week with the trade committee, where we were excited about the opening up of the export of our beef, from beef aged 21 months to beef aged 30 months now. However, Japan is another market that has been hurt because of the delays by the opposition with regard to this piece of legislation.

The tariff that really bothers me the most is the 60% to 70% tariff on our hog industry. It is amazing to see that kind of tariff placed on our hogs. That so important to us because our largest competitor in that market is the United States, which signed a free trade agreement with Panama on October 31. If we do not get our free trade agreement with Panama through the House, we will lose our competitive edge and never get it back. It is absolutely critical that we make sure that we stop playing around in the House and start doing what is right for Canadians. The opposition should get onboard.

There has been two and half years of filibustering in the House, two and a half years of wasted time and opportunity for us to be able to capitalize on the great infrastructure of the Panama Canal, as well as the opportunities for our agriculture sector and many others. The opposition says we are fast-tracking this by bringing in time allocation. I understand the NDP, because that is just their ideological bent and where they are at. They are what they are. However, two days ago we had the Liberals opposing our closure motion on this legislation. I find that really hard to understand.

Not only has the United States signed an agreement with Panama, but the European Union is also expected to sign an agreement, perhaps by the end of this year. Then we will lose a competitive edge with Europe as well.

It is absolutely amazing when we see what the opposition is doing with regard to this piece of legislation and the free trade agreements we have reached with nine different countries around the world and have been promoting. I just do not understand it.

I will quote the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who was the vice-chair of the trade committee at one time. He said that when it comes to trade agreements, they are "job-destroying". I do not understand where he gets that math. How can he possibly get there?

There is only one thing that we heard with regard to trade in the NDP's platform and that was a $21 billion cap and trade carbon tax. That is what the opposition is promoting, instead of the positive trade we will experience when we pass this piece of legislation. I encourage the House to get on with this. The next two hours cannot go fast enough.

● (1610)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was quite a treat to listen to the combination of myths, fantasy and distortion from my hon. colleague opposite.

I would like a factual answer to a serious question. The hon. member sits on the trade committee with me and he heard the evidence we heard, that Panama is one of the top two tax havens in the world, that it launders an incredible amount of drug money, and that it would be prudent to have a tax information exchange agreement in place so we would have transparency to assure Canadians that laundered money and tax-protected money is not making its way into this country. We heard that the U.S. Congress insisted that an exchange agreement be in place before it signed a free trade agreement, and I put a motion before the committee to ask the committee to ensure such an agreement is in place before we give preferential trade status to Panama.

Can my hon. friend opposite answer why he voted against ensuring we have a tax information exchange agreement with Panama in place before we sign a trade agreement, as our colleagues in the United States insisted on so prudently?

● (1615)

Hon. Rob Merrifield: We have heard for two and a half years that the reason the New Democrats are saying no to this is because of a tax haven in Panama. It was on a grey list, and it has moved from a grey list to a white list. My hon. colleague knows this. We heard it in testimony at the committee. He heard from the finance department that this is working and that there is a change with Panama. Panama has come a long way.

We could take two approaches. One approach is as we did with Jordan, where we sign an agreement to try to improve the labour situation and some of the corruption we potentially see in some of these countries. Or, we could just step aside and wait until they have their house completely in order. Our approach is to go in, engage and be able to bring them into a place that is much more positive. That is exactly where Panama is. It has gone from a grey list to a white list, and it is improving.

The hon. colleague knows full well that this is going to be worked out in this legislation, and that is the fact. The hon. colleague, if he were absolutely true to himself and to this House, would admit it.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for bringing the merits of this agreement so clearly to the attention of this House. Panama is both a valued partner of Canada, in and of itself, and also a hub for international trade. We on this side look forward to voting in favour of this agreement.

However, the member mentions the opposition's position on this trade deal, as on so many others. What would the opposition's anti-trade agenda mean for Canada if any government were foolish enough to implement even some of these aspects? It is against trade agreements with the nine countries with which we have negotiated, and with the scores of countries we would like to negotiate with. The opposition would instead like a $21 billion carbon tax.

The Leader of the Opposition, while mentioning the IMF today in favourable terms, does not agree with what the IMF is calling for, which is fiscal consolidation. Deficit reduction is what our government is doing, and the NDP does not want to do it. Does the member—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Yellowhead.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, not only would their carbon tax be an absolute blowout, estimated at $21 billion, but with their anti-trade thing, now we are getting into serious money. If we got rid of NAFTA and all trade agreements, not only would it be an unbelievable black eye and message to the international community that our agricultural products are not the best in the world, which they are—the safest in the world and coveted by most of the world, along with our energy supply and on and on—but the amount of dollars that would be compromised would actually cripple this country. Canadians are too smart to buy this nonsense.

The opposition members are driven by ideology, based mainly on unions that are a little out of touch and self-serving. This is absolutely ridiculous. We cannot build the nation under that ideology. It is unfortunate that we have an opposition that is driven by ideology rather than actual facts and the reality that we are a trading nation and we have great optimistic opportunities as we move forward. We need to enhance and accelerate trade, not hamper it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-24, the Canada–Panama Economic Growth and Prosperity Act.

Bill C-24 follows up on a trade agreement that we signed with Panama on August 11, 2009. This free trade agreement poses some problems in a number of areas, including with regard to workers' rights and environmental protection standards. Today, however, I will focus on the issue of tax evasion and money laundering, which is very troubling.

When Todd Tucker of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch testified before the Standing Committee on International Trade on November 17, 2010, he said:

> Panama is one of the world's worst tax havens. It is home to an estimated 400,000 corporations, including offshore corporations and multinational subsidiaries. This is almost four times the number of corporations registered in Canada. So Panama is not just any developing country.

For decades, the Panamanian government has been deliberately pursuing a tax haven strategy. It offers foreign banks and firms a special offshore licence to conduct business there. Not only are these businesses not taxed, but they are subject to few regulations. According to the OECD, the Panamanian government does not have the legal capacity to verify key tax information about these businesses. Panama's shadowy financial practices also make it a very attractive place to launder money that comes from all over the world.

The Canada-Panama trade agreement could even exacerbate the problem posed by Panama's status as a tax haven. As the OECD pointed out, signing a trade agreement without first tackling Panama's shadowy financial practices may lead to greater tax evasion. There are no restrictions on capital entering or exiting Panama. Transactions are protected by banking secrecy, and financial activity is not monitored.

In March 2012, Canada and Panama entered into negotiations for a tax information exchange agreement. However, this agreement has not yet been concluded or signed. This is very troubling, considering the large amount of money laundering in Panama, including money from drug trafficking.

Furthermore, the issue of disclosing taxes has not been adequately addressed, even though the Panamanian government and the Conservative government claim that it has. Without a real political will, these agreements generally do nothing to eliminate legal tax evasion and do little to discourage individuals from illegally evading taxes. In general, tax information exchange agreements do not contain provisions on the automatic exchange of information. Individual requests must be made.

Members should listen carefully to what I am about to say, because it is the key part of my speech. The U.S. Congress refused to ratify a free trade agreement with Panama before it signed a tax information exchange agreement. According to tax evasion experts, the agreement with Panama enables it to sidestep the transparency provisions if they are contrary to Panamanian public policy.

As the opposition, we have made suggestions in the past to improve this agreement. During the clause-by-clause review, we proposed several amendments that would have made notable changes to the bill. These included the addition of crucial concepts of sustainable development and investment and, most importantly, we proposed a requirement for taxation transparency.

Before the clause-by-clause review of Bill C-24, the NDP moved a motion in the Standing Committee on International Trade to postpone the implementation of the Canada-Panama trade agreement until Panama agreed to sign an information exchange agreement. This motion was voted down by the Conservatives and the Liberals. That shows where those two dinosaur parties stand on proper, responsible tax policy.

● (1620)

Considering Panama's history and reputation in such matters, it is easy to see why such an agreement is necessary before we sign a trade deal. The U.S. Congress did not want to ratify the American free trade agreement with Panama until a tax information exchange agreement was signed. It is important to remember this because it is the crux of the matter. It is for this reason that the NDP has serious concerns, which I believe are shared by all Canadians.

Contrary to what the Conservatives would have Canadians believe, the NDP supports trade. We are in favour of developing Canadian exports by reducing trade barriers. We are in favour of developing an industry that exports value-added products. We are in favour of creating jobs in Canada by expanding access for Canadian products to foreign markets. We are in favour of increasing productivity by encouraging new investment. And, we are in favour of diversifying our exports.

The NDP has a trade strategy. We want to help Canadian businesses to be leaders in the global economy. We are going to improve the protection of human rights and the environment, and we will defend public resources and services that are essential to Canadians.

Finally, we are going to help lower Canada's trade deficit since, under the Conservative government, Canada has gone from having a trade surplus of $26 billion to having a trade deficit of $50 billion. Yes, I said "$50 billion". It is shameful.

Since the Conservatives took office, the manufacturing trade deficit has increased sixfold to $90 billion. We are exporting $30 billion more in raw materials but $35 billion less in value-added products.

The Conservatives' track record shows that their trade approach is not working. That is understandable, because they are very bad managers. They are not going to become good managers by repeating the words "growth" and "economy". Not at all. We know that, and so do Canadians.

The Conservatives are negotiating trade deals using an extreme, ideological strategy instead of making the interests of Canadians their priority. The Conservative government is completely dysfunctional and so is its trade strategy.

The NDP prefers a multilateral approach based on a sustainable trade model. In fact, bilateral trade deals are really just protectionist trade deals, since they give preferential treatment to a few partners and exclude the rest. This puts weaker countries in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis the larger partners. A sustainable multilateral trade model would avoid these issues while protecting human rights and the environment.

If the Conservative members have been listening to what I have tried to explain here, they will have understood that we do not oppose this agreement and that we want to give it a chance. All we are asking for is greater transparency. We do not want to be associated with tax evasion, and we especially do not want Canadian businesses to be associated with that, either.

I care about this country's businesses and their reputation. That is the difference between us and the Conservative government, which claims to be a good manager, to take care of Canadian interests and to be competent when it comes to the economy. This government is about to sign yet another free trade agreement—it is on quite a roll with these agreements—but it is not thinking carefully about its trade partners.

I am more than happy to do business, but not under just any conditions and to the detriment of Canadian businesses.

● (1625)

We in the NDP have ethics, and it would be nice if the government followed our lead.

What I wanted to say here today regarding the free trade agreement between Canada and Panama is simply that we support trade, but we believe that it must be carried out in a responsible and more serious manner for Canadians.

● (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have sat in the House now for the last two days and I have heard many NDP members get up and say they are in favour of trade. I have heard it dozens of times.

An hon. member: They vote against every deal.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, all I would ask is that they follow their applause with some concrete evidence and list the number of trade agreements they have voted for over the last 20 years in the House.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon: What a comment, Mr. Speaker.

We like to choose our partners. It just does not make sense to me that the Conservative government is signing free trade agreements with just about anyone, as if Canada were up for grabs.

Choosing our economic partners is the right thing to do. When it comes to Panama, I have some serious concerns.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to explain why supporting free trade is regressive.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that.

What I said was that the motions moved by the NDP were rejected by two dinosaur parties. The NDP believes that a tax information exchange agreement must be signed to improve Panama's transparency.

If the Americans asked for and got one, why is this not good for Canada? Why are we going to let them walk all over us as though we did not have any rights?

We are in a position to demand such an agreement. That is not regressive, it is forward-thinking.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to ask my colleague a question. Her speech was very interesting and emotional. I always like to hear her speak, especially about a free trade agreement such as this one, and present the NDP's vision, which I believe is the right vision for Canada. What she said is very important.

I would like to hear her talk more about the problem created by a government or a country that has these types of economic relationships with a country that does not comply with certain basic tax rules. What message does this send to the international community?

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, we have some questions.

What message does that send? It sends a strange message that we respect certain economic partners and not others. When a country is known for tax evasion, we have every reason to be asking questions. Are we making the right choices? Are we making the right decisions in negotiating with this country?

As I said earlier, if the Conservatives were at least open to the idea of signing an initial tax evasion information exchange agreement, the government would prove that it does not agree to any old conditions when doing business with other countries. Right now, we get the impression that it does not care and that all it wants is to sign as many free trade agreements as possible, with any country. It gives the impression that the countries do not matter, as long as we are signing agreements. That is questionable.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Québec for her speech. I also congratulate her for her work on the Standing Committee on International Trade, where I think she does a fantastic job.

Yesterday in my speech, I quoted an organization that is critical of tax havens. It had a few things to say in its assessment of Panama, which I will share.

[*English*]

Among their findings on Panama, this is what they said about automatic information exchange, "Does the jurisdiction participate fully in Automatic Information Exchange such as the European Savings Tax Directive? Panama does not participate fully in Automatic Information Exchange".

[*Translation*]

That is very worrisome. I would ask my colleague to comment on that.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I thank my distinguished colleague who also sits on the Standing Committee on International Trade. He was able to bring in all of these comments from experts, from people who are familiar with the situation. When tax experts are telling us to be careful with Panama, that is something we need to take seriously.

We would like this government to take the necessary precautions this time with this free trade agreement. I would like this government to listen to us and make an attempt to sign an information agreement so that there is more transparency.

● (1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Churchill, Culture; the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Employment.

[*English*]

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege and an honour to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to this very important Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

I think it is the third time that I have visited Panama as part of the trade committee of which I have been a member for about six and half years. Back in May 2008, we travelled to Panama and had over 60 hours of extensive debate in a variety of committees and in the chamber. I am hoping that later this afternoon we will see logic prevail and this agreement continue through the House and become an act as soon as possible for businesses across Canada so they will have a rules-based and fair-trading system in a Canada-Panama relationship.

I will first take a moment to thank all the members of the House who paid tribute to our veterans. The speeches we heard were very emotional. When we look into the eyes of our veterans, we think of the men and women who are serving today and have served. I think of the veterans in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country. It is an honour and a humbling experience to be their member of Parliament. It is because of their dedication and sacrifice that we have the best country in the world.

Our government believes in the importance of our veterans. We also want to expand our economy to make Canada an even better place.

We are focusing on a global commerce strategy because we understand the importance of trade. In fact, one in every five jobs is dependent on trade in Canada and it represents nearly 65% of our country's income. Indeed, the importance of international trade to an export-oriented economy like Canada has cannot be overestimated. There is no doubt that trade sustains the incomes and living standards of Canadians and ensures the long-term prosperity of our country. Furthermore, integration with regional and global trading networks is essential.

As a trading nation, Canadian exporters, producers and investors need access to international markets to stay competitive. It is pretty simple: When we trade, we become more competitive. Prices for goods and services go down. wages, salaries and our standard of living go up, and businesses are able to hire more workers. In addition, internationally-oriented firms are better positioned to withstand global downturns.

Our government understands, as most Canadians do, that trade is a kitchen table issue. The Minister of International Trade is with the Prime Minister in India right now working on expanding agreements. He understands the importance of trade to help families put food on the table and make ends meet.

We have heard from my hon. colleague for Yellowhead earlier today and yesterday from the member for London West, the hard-working member for the 10th largest city in Canada, as he likes to inform us, on the importance of how we need to work together to break down these trade barriers so that Canadian businesses can be competitive.

In my own riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, Campion Marine, the largest boat manufacturer in Canada, is continually requesting that we break down barriers so that the excise taxes that are in place in other countries can be eliminated and it can be competitive. That 5% sometimes can be the difference between success and hiring more people or, unfortunately, not being competitive in the marketplace.

As I mentioned, not only does trade support the quality of life for Canadians but it provides hope, jobs and opportunities for our children and grandchildren. It would be difficult for the average Canadian to imagine a world without international trade.

Our Conservative government clearly understands that our standard of living and Canadians' future prosperity will be generated by deepening and broadening our trading relationships. That is why deepening Canada's trading relationship is rapidly growing in markets around the world, such as Panama, which is an important part of this government's pro-trade plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Canada's exporters, investors and service providers are calling for these opportunities. Business owners and entrepreneurs want access to global markets. We heard numerous witnesses testify at our trade committee saying that they need to be competitive. Unfortunately, the opposition continues to delay this.

We heard back on October 31, just last month, that the Panama-U.S. agreement had come into place. However, we are still at the gate. Our American colleagues in the south and their businesses are out making deals while we are spinning our wheels.

We cannot stop this. We need to continue to move forward. With the co-operation of the opposition and all members of this House, we can continue to expand, establish and grow our pro-trade plan.

● (1640)

Since 2006, Canada has concluded new trade agreements with nine countries. They include: Colombia; Jordan; Peru; the European trade association member states of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland; most recently, Honduras; and, of course, the discussion this afternoon is on Panama.

We are also negotiating with more than 50 countries, including major economies such as the European Union, India and Japan. Last week I was with some of the trade committee members in Japan where we are working on an economic partnership agreement, which is looking very promising, to expand relationships with Japan.

A deal with the European Union would represent the most significant Canadian trade initiative since the North American free trade agreement. Such a deal could potentially boost our bilateral trade with this important partner by 20%. It could also provide a $12 billion annual boost to Canada's economy, which is like a $1,000 increase in the average Canadian family's income or almost 80,000 new jobs.

Canada has also officially joined the trans-Pacific partnership, otherwise known as the TPP. The potential benefits of this initiative are enormous. The TPP market represents more than 658 million people and a combined GDP of over $20 trillion.

By improving access to foreign markets for Canadian businesses, we are supporting the Canadian recovery and creating new jobs for Canadian workers. It is part of our economic action plan. As the Minister of Finance alluded to during question period, the importance of helping small businesses grow with a tax credit is an initiative within budget 2012.

Within our free trade agreement with Panama, we have the government's efforts to strengthen the Canadian economy once again. These are multi-prong approaches to help grow our economy and create jobs. Pursuing bilateral and regional trade agreements is essential to bringing continued prosperity to Canadians.

I understand, and it is unfortunate, the opposition NDP continues to stand in the way of our efforts to open up new markets for our exporters. I would love to see the WTO and the multilateral agreements come to completion as well, but the reality is that they are stalled. In the meantime we continue to work with bilateral agreements and multilateral with the trans-Pacific partnership.

The NDP comes up with all these excuses and says it believes in free and fair trade. We do as well, but we are also doing the trade agreements rather than just talking about them. The fact is that the NDP's anti-trade record is clear. My hon. colleague and seatmate just asked the opposition party if it could please list off the number of trade agreements it has supported over the last 20 years. It was like a deer in the headlights. Unfortunately, there was no response. The NDP members like to talk about it over there, but we are doing it. Going all the way back to NAFTA, they have consistently opposed our efforts to create new opportunities for exporters and investors. On this side of the House, we are tired of hearing all the naysayers. We will continue to move forward in creating jobs.

The anti-trade NDP's special interest backers continue to fearmonger and misrepresent the facts about trade. They believe that the global economy is something Canadian workers should fear. Our government knows that our businesses, our entrepreneurs and our workers can compete with the very best in the world and win. With a rules-based, level playing field, Canadians will be number one.

However, to compete and win, Canadians need to be on a level playing field. With the entry into force of the United States-Panama free trade agreement just last month, Canadian firms are no longer competing on a level playing field. Their American competitors are now able to sell their products in Panama at a lower cost as the result of the duty-free access they enjoy under the US-Panama FTA. This is why the implementation of this trade agreement is an urgent priority for our government. Canadian companies are constantly proving that they are competitive enough to compete and succeed in the global marketplace, but the government has a responsibility to do all it can to help those companies succeed abroad.

Governments do not create jobs. We create the framework and the environment. We minimize regulations. We have to have incentives where necessary, but ultimately it is the private sector that will create the jobs. That is why our government will fight to ensure that businesses have what they need to be successful abroad and ensure that the Canada-Panama free trade agreement is ratified and enters into force as soon as possible.

In closing, we must prevent Canadian firms from losing market share in Panama and defend the competitiveness of our businesses in this fast-growing emerging market. In a short time, we will be voting on Bill C-24 in the House. This is why I ask for the support of all hon. members for the Canada-Panama free trade agreement and the parallel labour co-operation and environment agreements. It is the right thing to do for Canadians.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member said that, in the House, the NDP stands in the way of all free trade.

I do not understand how amendments stand in the way of a bill, a motion or anything else. We are talking about the role of the House, the very role of parliamentarians.

I would like the member to explain to me what democracy means to him. What is the role of a parliamentarian if not to introduce bills and debate them in order to make them better?

[*English*]

Hon. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, I just find it bizarre that the member even asked the question. The question was asked by my seatmate about the last 20 years and there was no response.

There will be dissenting opinions but there has to be something that the member agrees with in the trade agreement, such as the fact that NAFTA has been the best thing for both sides of the border. The U.S. is our biggest ally, 35 out of the 50 states, and Canada's number one trading partner. There is about $1.9 billion a day of trade going across the border. We are looking at expanding because we do not want to depend on one country. About 75% of our trade is done with the U.S. We need to diversify, just like our investment portfolios. That is why we are opening borders across markets.

Why would the opposition not at least say that they see the logic in creating jobs and opening opportunities for Canadians? That is what we are doing.

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 thank the member for Kelowna—Lake Country for his terrific speech. I would also like to recognize his work on the trade committee. The general public watching this may not know that he is also the person who put in the bill to allow wine to cross provincial borders. That was an important bill for British Columbia. It still has to be put in place by the provinces. We are hoping they will do that soon.

However, on Panama specifically, there is about $111 million of merchandise trade going from Canada to Panama. Therefore, Canadian exporters are exporting about 111 million dollars' worth of goods into Panama and are paying a duty on that. The opposition members talk about trade with Panama as if none already exists. We already have a vibrant trade between Canada and Panama.

How will this help trade that is already in place?

Hon. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hard-working colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade. It is a real pleasure to work with him on our trade committee and moving forward.

While representing Kelowna—Lake Country in 1989 when NAFTA came in, there was all this fearmongering that the world was going to come to an end, so we replanted the grapes and we have some international award-winning wines now produced in the Okanagan, through Ontario and across Canada. Therefore, it has been of benefit to all Canadians.

With respect to the Panama trade agreement, the NDP have said that we need to restore our imbalance of trade. How do we do that? By opening up new markets. The fact is that we cannot have it both ways by talking through one side of our mouths and out the other. We want to open up markets. We want to expand on machinery, precious metal opportunities and agriculture.

There are opportunities for people from every province. Whether from British Columbia, the forest sector, in machinery, the agricultural community or financial services, there is something for everybody. There is a job waiting for one of your constituents if you would just stand up and support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I would just remind hon. members to direct their comments through the Chair.

We have time for a short question and response. The hon. member for Saint–Jean.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to respond to the member opposite, I would say that there are many ways to make easy money. Many criminal activities can also make a lot of money.

The member opposite said that, at the end of the day, the most important thing is to do business and to make money. Would he go so far as to say to his constituents that he is prepared to engage in just about any criminal activity to make money?

● (1650)

[*English*]

Hon. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, we have the most open and honest government that I have ever had the pleasure to serve with in the last six years. We are bringing fair trading rules so that Canadians have investment protection and there is a rules-based trading system. Why would members be against bringing rules so that people in both countries are treated fairly? This is all about fairness and providing opportunities for business so that we can compete on an equal basis.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are no words I like to hear more than "new markets".

I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-24, the legislation implementing the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, as well as the related agreements on labour co-operation and the environment. Today I would like to focus on the commercial opportunities that exist in Panama. It is unfortunate that members opposite continue to suggest that this agreement should not be a priority for our government. It is no surprise to hear this from New Democrats. They, after all, have consistently opposed our government's efforts to open up new markets and create new opportunities for our exporters.

It is disappointing to hear others, like the member for Malpeque, whose own constituents stand to benefit from this agreement, in particular Prince Edward Island's potato exporters. The member for Malpeque has suggested that since our bilateral trade with Panama represents a fraction of our global trade, we should not concern ourselves with it. How wrong he is. That is why today I would like to spend a few minutes talking about some of the opportunities that exist in Panama and why it is in our nation's best interests to forge closer economic ties with this dynamic and fast-growing economy.

Panama has long been considered a logistics centre and international connection point in the Latin American region. Panama is often referred to as the gateway to Latin America and plays a critical role in connecting the Americas. Panama is a central point for goods travelling to Latin America, a nexus for international trade and a strategic hub for the region. According to Panamanian estimates, 5% of world trade passed through the Panama Canal in 2010, but that is not all. In addition to its importance as a hub for global shipping, Panama boasts a stable and robust economy with the second highest per capita income in Central America. In 2011, Panama's economy recorded real GDP growth of 10.6% and all indications show that this impressive growth rate will continue well into the future.

Like Canada, Panama welcomes international commerce and is committed to providing a stable and pro-business environment for trade and investment. In 2011, Panama received the fifth highest score in Latin America in the annual World Bank rankings of countries for ease of doing business. Panama is a perfect example of a dynamic, fast-growing economy with tremendous potential, just the type of economy our businesses need to engage with in order to succeed in the 21st century.

It should not be a surprise that Canadian businesses have already begun taking notice of this country's commercial potential. In 2011, our two-way merchandise trade totalled $235 million and this figure is rapidly growing. In fact, over the past five years bilateral merchandise trade between Canada and Panama has increased by 105%. Panama currently represents our second most important export destination in Central America. Number one is Costa Rica and we already have a free trade agreement there. It is clear that this thriving economy offers tremendous commercial opportunities for Canadian businesses, but what is even more impressive are the opportunities that lay ahead.

Panama continues to invest heavily in large strategic projects that will solidify its position as an important emerging market in the global economy. In addition to the widely reported $5.3 billion project to expand the Panama Canal, the Panamanian government is implementing a five-year infrastructure plan valued at $13.6 billion. Furthermore, under the strategic plan, the government of Panama has designated $2.8 billion for transportation infrastructure projects alone. Numerous infrastructure projects to build hospitals, social housing, bridges and airports are either already in progress or under consideration. Looking ahead, tendering processes for projects such as airport improvement and the construction of the fourth bridge over the Panama Canal are expected in the coming months.

● (1655)

Opportunities also exist in the energy sector, which is, as we all know, another area of expertise for Canadian companies. Panama's energy needs have increased significantly in recent years, with demand increasing 5% to 7% annually. The expansion of the Panama Canal and a large number of other private and public infrastructure projects have led to an aggressive road map for increasing the installed base of energy generation and transmission.

Canadian companies are acknowledged leaders in the development of these types of projects and clearly have the expertise to meet Panama's development plans. By implementing the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, our government will support Canadian companies looking to capitalize on these opportunities, by solidifying their ability to participate in large-scale infrastructure projects in Panama. The government procurement chapter in this agreement will guarantee that Canadian suppliers have non-discriminatory access to the broad range of government procurement opportunities in Panama and receive the same treatment as Panamanian firms when bidding for these opportunities.

Panama's vibrant market has been sparking interest in the business community across Canada. Canadian companies are eager to capitalize on these commercial opportunities. Our government is doing all it can to support Canadian companies. The opportunities are out there, and clearly Canadian firms have the expertise to succeed. It is our job to ensure they have access to these opportunities and are able to compete on a level playing field against foreign competitors.

With the United States-Panama free trade agreement entering into force on October 31 of this year, we must act quickly to implement the Canada-Panama free trade agreement so Canadian companies can compete on a level playing field and continue to be successful in Panama. Despite the continued opposition of the Liberals and the NDP, our government is creating new opportunities for Canadian exporters.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): I listened carefully to my colleague's speech. I will ask her what is probably the easiest question she has had to answer in the House: does she approve of trade with a country that is considered to be a tax haven?

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, what we know about Panama is that they are complying with the OECD and all of the requirements there. They are moving forward and have been designated as being on the white list.

What I do know is that free trade agreements are good for everyone. What we do know is that the rising tide lifts all boats, and so everyone stands to win out of a free trade agreement.

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, my question is quite simple. The reality is that for many years Canada depended upon the United States for trade. It was 82% of our trade that crossed the border, north and south. Today 72% of our trade crosses the border north and south.

Our growth is outside of North America; it is not inside of North America. If we do not sign agreements with countries like Panama, if we do not look to the European Union, if we do not look to Japan, if we do not continue with this very aggressive free trade blitzkrieg, if you will, that we have had as a government, what will happen to our nation?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, trade has long been the history of Canada's success. If we look at the earliest Europeans who came here, we had the Hudson's Bay Company setting up trade with Europe from the very inception of their moving into Canada.

Trade is very important, and it is even more important now as we move into this global economy. We absolutely have to seek out new trade agreements and new places for our exporters to find markets. We are very aggressive on this. Our government is focused on it. We will continue to pursue these trade agreements.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague opposite for her speech. I heard only the end of it, but it seemed very interesting.

I have a very simple question for the member. My colleague from Sherbrooke talked about the fact that, despite everything that some people are saying, Panama is still considered a tax haven.

Panama does not appear on the list of countries with which Canada has signed tax information exchange agreements. Canada has signed hundreds of these agreements, but it has not signed any with Panama. It seems to me that it will be difficult to insist that Panama sign a tax information exchange agreement after a free trade agreement has been concluded.

Why did this government not think of that before putting this free trade agreement with Panama on the table?

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, previously Panama was on the grey list of the OECD, but as of July 6, 2011, it has concluded the required number of 12 double taxation agreements, and the OECD has formally placed Panama on the list of jurisdictions that have substantially implemented the international standards for exchange of tax information, commonly known as the white list.

Is there more to be done? Yes, but we will work with Panama to see that happens.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP did refer to trade in its last platform. NDP members, in fact, referred to a $21 billion carbon tax. They are in favour of trade, but so often they are not in favour of trade because they forget it is not just the big companies that benefit from trade but the smaller companies. In my riding, it is the farmers. When we sign this free trade agreement, it will help the farmers in my riding who are growing beef and pork and products that will be processed locally and then shipped overseas.

I am urging my colleagues across the way to support it, at least for the farmers in their regions. Not many of them represent farming areas, but for even the ones who might have a bit around the edge, it would be good if they would support it. I ask my colleague if she would agree that this is crucial for our farming community in Canada.

Ms. Lois Brown: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Even though I live in Newmarket, and Newmarket—Aurora is an urban centre now, we are surrounded by farming community. It is essential for our farming communities to have access to these new markets.

I thank my colleague for Kitchener—Conestoga for the question and for identifying that agriculture would win from this type of trade agreement.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues who have spoken so far to Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama. They have also done a fine job of explaining the NDP's position on this bill and why we oppose it.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-24 on the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. This is not the first time we have talked about this bill and opposed it. It was introduced in the House in the 40th Parliament, where it reached second reading stage. The bill died on the order paper because of the election, as we all know.

I will try to explain why the NDP opposes this bill and the trade agreements proposed therein.

The free trade agreement is worrisome given the controversies surrounding Panama's track record on respecting workers' rights, human rights and the environment and because Panama is used as a tax haven for tax evasion.

In our opinion, this agreement promotes the exploitation of workers and human rights. When the committee studied Bill C-46, we heard convincing testimony about the fact that Panama had a bad track record when it comes to workers' rights and that the side agreements on labour co-operation were very weak.

Teresa Healy, senior researcher with the social and economic policy department of the Canadian Labour Congress, said:

> The Canada-Panama agreement does not include specific protection for the right of association and the right to strike. Instead, it provides "effective" recognition for the right to bargain collectively. As far as union rights are concerned, the agreement is, therefore, weaker than previous agreements.
>
> On labour issues, the amendments are modest; there are no countervailing duties; there is no provision for abrogation or any other such remedy; and again, labour provisions are in a side agreement outside the main agreement.

She added:

> I would like to say a few words about labour rights in Panama.
>
> Panama has a population of about 3.4 million. It is currently enjoying relatively high rates of growth, but it is ranked second among countries in the region in terms of inequality: 40% of Panama's inhabitants are poor, 27% are extremely poor, and the rate of extreme poverty is particularly high among indigenous populations. In recent years, the country has undergone considerable liberalization and privatization, but they have not trickled down to financially benefit the population.

When we look at Panama's labour laws and the lack of protection for its working people, it amazes me that the Government of Canada is in such a hurry to sign an agreement with this country.

Teresa Healy of the Canadian Labour Congress testified before the committee about the labour co-operation agreement. She said that, although the agreement mentions the International Labour Organization's core labour standards, it is still too weak. What is more, in recent years, the Panamanian government has been increasingly harsh on labour unions and workers. We are convinced that this trade agreement does not respect the integrity of human rights.

The Government of Canada issued an official warning that can be found on the site for tourists and investors. It reads:

> OFFICIAL WARNING: Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada advises against all travel beyond the town of Yaviza in Darién Province. The danger zone begins at the end of the Pan American Highway (past Yaviza, about 230 km southeast of Panama City) and ends at the Colombian border. This area includes parts of Darién National Park and privately owned nature reserves and tourist resorts. Due to the presence of Colombian guerrilla groups and drug traffickers, levels of violent crime in this zone are extremely high, with numerous reports of kidnapping, armed robberies, deaths and disappearances.

I would also like to add that Darién National Park is a nature reserve in the Darién region of Panama that has been a UNESCO world heritage site since 1981.

● (1705)

Darién National Park is the largest of Panama's national parks. It is connected to Los Katíos National Park in Colombia.

I would like to quote the hon. member for Newton—North Delta. When the bill reached second reading stage, she said:

> It seems that we have not learned too many lessons from our experiences with NAFTA. As a result of NAFTA, we have seen hundreds of thousands of jobs disappear over the border and into other countries.

During the clause-by-clause review, the NDP member for Vancouver Kingsway proposed several amendments that would have made progressive changes to the bill. The changes would have integrated into the bill the protection of workers' rights, including the right to collective bargaining. Other amendments would have required the Minister of International Trade to consult workers and unions, as well as human rights experts and organizations, in order to conduct analyses of the impact of the trade agreement. That motion was rejected by the Conservatives and the Liberals.

As for respecting the environment, the agreement on the environment is an exact replica of environmental agreements we have signed before, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on Trade in Hazardous Goods, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

Canada and Panama have agreed to not weaken their environmental regulations in order to attract investment, and interested parties must ask the government to investigate suspected violations of environmental regulations. However, it is important to note that there are no financial penalties for non-compliance.

Panama is also a tax haven. In March 2012, Canada and Panama began negotiations on a tax information exchange agreement. However, this agreement has not yet been signed. A lot of money laundering goes on in Panama, particularly with money from drug trafficking. The lack of tax transparency in Panama led the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, to label this country as a tax haven. It is often necessary to know the name of the suspected tax evader in order to obtain tax information from the other country. Governments cannot easily access this information.

Before the clause-by-clause review of Bill C-24, the member for Vancouver Kingsway moved a motion in committee to postpone the implementation of the Canada-Panama trade agreement until Panama agreed to sign a tax information exchange agreement. Once again, this motion was voted down by the Conservatives and the Liberals.

We want fair trade. In my riding, Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, many people buy fair trade coffee. Do my colleagues have any idea what fair trade coffee is?

Panama is the smallest coffee producer in Central America. In the 2000s, the country experienced a coffee crisis. Producers banded together, and Panama's coffee was chosen as the best in the world for the first time in 2004. Fair trade coffee is the result of demand from consumers who all decided to make choices that would ensure that the producers receive fair payment for their product.

With this free trade agreement, we are worried that small producers will not end up processing or marketing their products. There is a very big risk of a third party taking over these steps, thus depriving the producer of the added value when selling the product. It is no easy task to protect one's business in a sector dominated by a handful of large-scale producers, and this is not a fair market.

● (1710)

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for her very enlightening and well-researched speech. As usual, she has shown that she was very well prepared.

The many troubling facts about Panama lead us to ask many questions. Because of the problems she outlined, it is worrisome that the Republic of Panama adopted legislative amendments two years ago that prevent legal action against police in the event of certain abuses.

In light of everything she said, can my colleague tell us what she thinks of this unacceptable impunity of the Panamanian police?

● (1715)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou.

Drug trafficking endangers public safety and obviously leads to a lack of transparency. Consequently, it is possible that some police officers, who should be responsible for public safety, become the bad guys.

If there was a tax system that required the country to provide the names of people who make investments or park large amounts of money without providing any information, we could prevent these types of corrupt situations.

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a little earlier in my speech I spoke about some of the enormous commercial opportunities that would take place in Panama. It is putting huge investments into infrastructure projects. I commented about the billions of dollars that would go into Panama. Even the expansion of the Panama Canal would allow opportunities for infrastructure dollars to go there.

We know the U.S.-Panama free trade agreement came into effect on October 31, essentially giving United States companies the opportunity to move into that market now. Therefore, with the expertise that we have in Quebec in the aerospace industry, in machinery, in agriculture, why would my colleague want to put Quebec companies behind the eight ball and not allow them access to bid on some of those contracts?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

What we have actually seen is the opposite scenario. Unfortunately, every time we sign free trade agreements with new countries, many of our businesses close up shop. That is what happened in the forestry sector, for example. Even the pharmaceutical sector is moving to a country where employees are paid less, their rights are not respected and where production will be less expensive. Thus, this will result in some of our businesses closing their doors.

This also affects our GDP and Canadians' quality of life. We are losing jobs, not gaining them, in those situations.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad for this opportunity to ask my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles a question, as I know she is deeply concerned about workers' rights in Québec and everywhere in Canada.

I was very surprised by some of the things I heard during the speeches, especially from the Conservative side. I remember that yesterday, my colleague from Hochelaga said that with this bill, workers will not be allowed to strike and, on top of that, employers will have the right to hire scabs. I have a very simple question.

Could my colleague comment on that?

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone can guess what my reply will be.

Workers' rights, their right to unionize and their right to defend their interests must be respected. People are being forced to work in so-called free zones, for terrible wages and terrible hours, for an unbelievable number of days and in unbelievable conditions. Indeed, the right of association must be promoted and respected.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to talk about the Canada-Panama free trade agreement and the many benefits this agreement would bring for agriculture and agrifood producers and exporters.

First, I would like to emphasize that our Conservative government clearly understands that our standard of living and Canadians' future prosperity will be generated by a deepening and broadening of our trading relationships.

That is why our government is committed to securing and deepening access to traditional markets such as the United States, while broadening and expanding access to dynamic and fast growing economies around the world. Pursuing new trade opportunities is a win-win for Canada and its trading partners.

Canadians benefit from jobs, prosperity and consumer benefits that come from increased trade. In turn, our international partners, many of which represent developing economies, benefit from an ever-expanding middle class and improved standard of living that is lifting more of the world's population out of poverty.

We are also creating new opportunities for our exporters, opportunities that are bringing jobs, growth and long-term prosperity to hard-working Canadians across the country.

As Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector becomes more modern, more innovative and more competitive, the sector is becoming a more significant part of Canada's economy. In fact, in 2012 the agriculture and agri-food industry accounted for one of every eight jobs in Canada. This translated into employment for over two million Canadians. It also accounted for 8% of Canada's gross domestic product.

In 2011 Canada ranked as the fifth largest exporter of agriculture and agri-food products on the planet, thanks to exports totalling $41 billion. That is why our government works tirelessly to improve access to international markets for agricultural exporters.

Whereas over its 13 years in government the Liberals completed only three trade deals, in less than six years our government has concluded free trade agreements with nine countries. They are Colombia, Jordan, Panama, Peru, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland and Honduras. Sadly, the ideologically driven NDP has consistently opposed these agreements.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement we are debating today is another example of the actions our government is taking to support Canadians as they compete and win in the global economy.

Our government will ensure that Canadian agriculture and agri-food producers and exporters remain competitive with exporters to Panama. I want to emphasize why this is so important.

As members of the House are aware, Panama has also concluded free trade agreements with the United States and the European Union. Panama's free trade agreement with the European Union could enter into force as early as the end of this year. However, the United States-Panama free trade agreement entered into force just last week.

The United States is Canada's biggest competitor in Panama and many Canadian exports are in direct competition with those of the United States.

Canadian products are now at a competitive disadvantage as they continue to face duties while exports from the United States enjoy duty-free access. Over 87% of U.S. exports of consumer and industrial goods to Panama are entering that country duty-free. Our government will not let Canadians compete on an unlevel playing field. It is time the House finally passes this agreement.

Our agreement with Panama is a comprehensive agreement that covers market access for goods, including agriculture and agri-food products. In 2011 Canada exported nearly $25 million worth of agriculture and agri-food products to Panama.

Upon implementation of this agreement, high quality Canadian products such as beef, pork, malt, frozen potatoes, pulses, maple syrup and canola will benefit immediately from duty-free access to Panama. This will be welcome news for agriculture and agri-food exporters.

Let me cite one example. Canada's exporters of frozen french fries will benefit from the immediate elimination of Panama's tariffs of 20% on this product. In 2011 Canada exported almost $12 million worth of frozen french fries to Panama. This is a $1 million increase over 2010 exports.

It is curious that the member for Malpeque has suggested that in the past our government has exaggerated the benefits of the agreement. I would remind him that his home province of P.E.I. exported over $1 million of potatoes to Panama just last year.

Our pulse exporters will also benefit from this agreement. Tariffs of up to 15% will be eliminated with the implementation of this agreement.

● (1720)

Canadian malt exporters would benefit from the immediate elimination of Panamanian tariffs of up to 10%. Our pork sector would also benefit. Tariffs on pork products, such as fresh and chilled pork cuts and sausages, would also see immediate tariff elimination. Everyone knows the difficulty our pork producers have had in recent years. This is an industry that desperately needs this help.

In 2009, Panama re-opened its market to Canadian beef and in 2010 Panama lifted the last of its BSE-related limits on imports from Canada, including a ban on live cattle. This was good news for our beef exporters, and this agreement would bring them even further benefits. Under this agreement, Canada's beef exporters would see the immediate elimination of Panamanian tariffs ranging from 25% to 30% on all of Canada's beef cuts within a 200 ton tariff rate quota. Panama's tariffs on other agricultural exports, such as refined canola oil and refined sugar from Canada, would be eliminated over a period of five to fifteen years. This particular agreement would have ongoing and increasing benefits for agriculture and agrisector producers.

Those are just some of the benefits that our producers and exporters would see from this agreement. It is obvious that, for all of those reasons, the Canada–Panama agreement would be a win for Canadian agriproducers. It would create more Canadian jobs by enhancing our ability to export more goods and services to this dynamic and fast-growing market, including our agricultural goods.

I ask all members to join me in supporting this agreement.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the same question I asked earlier, but I will be more precise. I would appreciate a yes or no answer.

Putting specific countries aside, does the member think that Canada should sign a free trade agreement with a known tax haven? I am not asking for information about Panama specifically. Yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, Panama, in particular, has actually done a lot of work to move itself to what we call "the white list". It has completed several different components of the status that was given to it to complete before we did that. We continue to work with Panama, and it is working toward establishing itself as a country that will be on the white list, which will continue to improve some of these issues that the colleague opposite talks about.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing about the NDP that never ceases to amaze me is when it opposes free trade agreements with developing countries because it claims to be the party that helps the poor. However, its opposition to trade agreements with developing countries does nothing but keep those countries poor, which is really shameful on its behalf.

In terms of agriculture, I have the honour of representing the constituency that is the largest canola producing constituency in the country. I was very pleased to learn of the potential for the canola industry.

Would my hon. friend tell me about other markets for specialty agriculture products that may become available with this free trade agreement?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, I look to my own riding in the northern part of Nova Scotia that hugely bases its economy on agriculture. We have pork producers have suffered greatly. One of the largest pork producers in Atlantic Canada is still in my riding. This would open up the Panama market to him. It would remove those barriers. It would actually level the playing field with the Americans who have just recently put their deal with Panama into force.

I look at the maple syrup producers in my riding, and there are literally hundreds. We are one of the largest producers of maple syrup. This would level the playing field so that they could export goods.

We look at our beef producers who have had such a difficult time since the BSE crisis in 2003. These trade deals opened up international markets that, until recently, were closed to them, and it levels the playing field with many other countries so they can now export their beef and continue to build this business which has been in such a great crisis.

Without a doubt, this deal is important for us to settle and settle right away. With the U.S. putting its deal into force last week, it has an advantage of getting into the supply chain now, knocking out our companies and taking away those particular agreements from companies that could exploit them. So we need to level the playing field with the United States and that necessitates that we pass this deal immediately.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to ask a question immediately after a colleague with whom I sat on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, where he and I had some very good discussions.

I would like the hon. member opposite's views on tax information exchange agreements. Canada is a champion in that respect. It has signed hundreds of such agreements with various countries.

We are currently signing a free-trade agreement, absent a tax information exchange agreement, with Panama, a country known to be a tax haven, even though it is no longer on the dreaded grey list.

What does the member opposite think about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague indicated, Panama has moved off the black list and onto the white list. Since March 2012, we have been negotiating a tax information deal with it.

All we need to do is look at what our agriculture exporters will face if we do not level the playing field with the United States. Just in the area of beef alone, hundreds of thousands of cows will probably move to Panama. If we do not level the playing field, we will not have access to that supply chain, to that market. On behalf of our beef producers alone, the sector of the agricultural community that has faced such a great crisis since the BSE crisis of 2003, we need to move on this quickly. I do not understand why my colleagues across the way are continuously trying to slow this deal down and hurt our beef producers.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the benefits for Canadian investors and service providers from the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

First, I would like to emphasize how disappointing it was to hear some of the comments yesterday from the members opposite. We have before us in this House the opportunity to bring a level playing field to our Canadian exporters. Today, as a result of the U.S.-Panama free trade agreement, they are at a disadvantage.

Our government is committed to giving our exporters the tools they need to compete on fair terms. I am surprised by the member for Malpeque, for example, who claims to support this agreement but called our bringing this legislation to a quick vote "absurd". I am sure the exporters in his home province of Prince Edward Island, who are facing Panamanian tariffs while their American competitors have duty-free access, would have a thing or two to say about that.

I am not surprised by the rhetoric coming from the NDP members. They have been consistently anti-trade since the days of NAFTA. Now they are committed to voting against yet another free trade deal. Obviously, a leopard does not change its spots.

I would like to speak to the benefits of this free trade agreement for Canadian investors. Foreign investment is an integral component of today's modern economy. With one in ten Canadian jobs generated by foreign investment, our government understands that attracting new investment is critical to the long-term prosperity of our economy. Investment not only produces jobs but it increases the transfer of know-how and of efficiencies and economies of scale to host the economy. It contributes to our nation's competitive advantage, it enhances productivity and it promotes innovations.

The results speak for themselves. Investments with our partners, inward and outward, are essential to the long-term prosperity of our economy. They not only strengthen Canada's global competitiveness at home but also paves the way for new opportunities for Canadian companies overseas.

This is why it is important to build on our investment relationship with countries like Panama. In fact, Panama is already an established and growing destination for Canadian direct investment abroad, particularly in areas such as construction, mining, banking and financial services. There are enormous commercial opportunities for Canadian investors in Panama.

We are already seeing some of these major projects unfold. Canadian companies are demonstrating tremendous interest in Panama, partly as a result of the major government projects currently under way there. These projects include the building or improvement of ports, roads, hospitals, social housing projects, bridges and airports, which are part of the $13.6 billion Panamanian government strategic investment plan. Under this plan, there are a large number of infrastructure projects that will create new opportunities for Canadian businesses.

The current and future opportunities in Panama for Canadian investors illustrate just how important it is to enhance our investment relationship with countries like Panama. Once this agreement is implemented, Canadian investors in Panama will enjoy greater stability, transparency and protection for their investments.

● (1735)

The free trade agreement with Panama would provide investors from both countries with the benefits that come with enhanced investment obligations. These reciprocal commitments would serve to promote bilateral investment flow, which is crucial in linking Canada to global value chains.

The agreement provides a range of obligations to protect investment abroad through legally binding rights and obligations. The investment obligations of this agreement incorporate several key principles, and they include treatment that is non-discriminatory, protection against expropriation without compensation and the free transfer of funds. Through this agreement, investors would also have access to a transparent, impartial and binding dispute settlement mechanism. While this agreement would ensure that investors and their investments are protected, it would not prevent either Canada or Panama from regulating in the public interest with respect to health, safety and the environment.

Let us now turn our focus to Canadian service providers. Our services sector is a critical component of the engine of our economy. In total, it is responsible for more than 70% of our total GDP and more than three in four jobs in Canada. That is why I am very pleased to see that our free trade agreement with Panama includes important provisions covering services that would open new doors for Canadian service providers. Indeed, this free trade agreement contains strong provisions governing cross-border trade and services that would provide new market access by Canadian service providers to Panama's dynamic and rapidly growing market.

The agreement provides market access beyond Panama's obligations under the World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services, particularly in areas of Canadian expertise and export interest, including mining and energy-related services, professional services, environmental services and information technology. Indeed, the free trade agreement we are debating here today contains substantive provisions governing cross-border trade and services, as well as providing a level market access similar to that afforded under the North American Free Trade Agreement. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement will provide a transparent, predictable and rules-based trading system to Canadian service providers, while ensuring they are treated equitably with Panamanian companies.

It is clear that Canadian service providers stand to benefit considerably from the implementation of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. In 2009, Canadian commercial services exports to Panama amounted to $48 million. This agreement provides a great opportunity to take our current bilateral trade in services to a new level in the years ahead.

Closer economic integration with Panama promises to deliver further gains for Canadian exporters, investors and service providers. Canadians value the real and tangible benefits that this agreement will produce, and that is why Canadian businesses have been strongly advocating in favour of this agreement.

However, to take advantage of these opportunities, this House must pass the Canada-Panama free trade agreement tonight. With the United States-Panama free trade agreement now in force, the timely implementation of this free trade agreement is much more critical. That is why I urge all hon. members to support the implementation of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague two questions.

There was a free trade agreement, and we studied it in committee. The NDP proposed some amendments, including to parallel agreements on the environment and on workers' rights.

My first question: Did the Conservatives act reasonably when they rejected every word of every amendment the NDP proposed in committee?

And my second question: Is that approach consistent with a desire to get the best possible outcome for Canadians? The Conservatives seem totally unable to listen to the official opposition and to negotiate with it.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, this agreement provides for a whole myriad of areas in its present form, including ensuring that Canada and Panama work under a fair and free trade arrangement. It would also respect one another's jurisdictions, environmental issues and other concerns that people may have with these types of agreements.

However, there is always the scare tactics from the NDP: if we sign this deal, the world falls apart; if we sign this deal, the environment falls apart. These are the scare tactics we get from the NDP any time we want to bring a free trade agreement forward in the House of Commons. It is nonsense stuff that comes from that side. They do not even support any free trade agreements that are brought to this House in any event.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:44 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, November 6, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1825)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 492)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Baird
Bélanger
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brison
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chisu
Clarke
Coderre
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Foote
Glover
Goodale
Gourde
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
McCallum
McGuinty
McLeod
Menzies
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Scarpaleggia
Shea
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Smith
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Tweed
Valeriote
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Zimmer– — 171

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Andrews
Aspin
Bateman
Bennett
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Casey
Chong
Clement
Cotler
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Galipeau
Goguen
Goodyear
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
Jean
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lebel
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Merrifield
Norlock
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Rae
Rajotte
Regan
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Schellenberger
Shipley
Sorenson
St-Denis
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Trudeau
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bellavance
Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Benskin

Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boulerice
Brahmi
Caron
Charlton
Chisholm
Christopherson
Côté
Cullen
Day
Donnelly
Dubé
Dusseault
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Groguhé
Hassainia
Hyer
Julian
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Mai
Mathyssen
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nicholls
Papillon
Péclet
Plamondon
Rafferty
Raynault
Sandhu
Sellah
Sitsabaiesan
Thibeault
Tremblay
Blanchette
Boivin
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Cash
Chicoine
Choquette
Cleary
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Freeman
Genest
Giguère
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Larose
Laverdière
Leslie
Marston
May
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Pilon
Quach
Ravignat
Rousseau
Scott
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stoffer
Toone
Turmel– — 90

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed from November 5 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, November 5 the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion for concurrence in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The question is on the amendment.

● (1830)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 493)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Aspin
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Galipeau
Goguen
Gourde
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Shea
Smith
Sorenson
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Zimmer– — 143
Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Baird
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Glover
Goodyear
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shipley
Sopuck
Stanton
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brison	Brosseau
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Mathyssen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stoffer	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Trudeau	Turmel
Valeriote– — 119	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the amendment carried.

The next question is on the main motion as amended.

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 Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP agrees to apply the results of the vote just taken and will vote no.

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals agree to apply and will vote against.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois votes no.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, no.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the Green Party agrees to apply and votes no.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 494)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
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
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Glover
Goguen	Goodyear
Gourde	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue

Poilievre
Preston
Raitt
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Reid
Rempel
Richards
Rickford
Ritz
Saxton
Schellenberger
Shea
Shipley
Smith
Sopuck
Sorenson
Stanton
Strahl
Sweet
Tilson
Toet
Toews
Trost
Trottier
Tweed
Valcourt
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 (Vancouver South)
Zimmer– — 143

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Andrews
Angus
Ashton
Atamanenko
Aubin
Ayala
Bélanger
Bellavance
Bennett
Benskin
Bevington
Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin
Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi
Brison
Brosseau
Caron
Casey
Cash
Charlton
Chicoine
Chisholm
Choquette
Christopherson
Cleary
Coderre
Côté
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dion
Dionne Labelle
Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre
Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault
Easter
Eyking
Foote
Freeman
Garrison
Genest
Genest-Jourdain
Giguère
Godin
Goodale
Gravelle
Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hsu
Hughes
Hyer
Jacob
Julian
Karygiannis
Kellway
Lamoureux
Lapointe
Larose
Latendresse
Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie
MacAulay
Mai
Marston
Mathyssen
May
McCallum
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nash
Nicholls
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Patry
Péclet
Pilon
Plamondon
Quach
Rae
Rafferty
Ravignat
Raynault
Regan
Rousseau
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Toone
Tremblay
Trudeau
Turmel
Valeriote– — 119

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion, as amended, carried. Accordingly the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates is referred back to the standing committee.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1835)

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from November 1 consideration of the motion that Bill C-427, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (income averaging for artists), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading of Bill C-427, under private members' business.

* * *

● (1840)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 495)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Andrews
Angus
Ashton
Atamanenko
Aubin
Ayala
Bélanger
Bellavance
Bennett
Benskin
Bevington
Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin
Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi
Brison
Brosseau
Caron
Casey
Cash
Charlton
Chicoine
Chisholm
Choquette
Christopherson
Cleary
Coderre
Côté
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dion
Dionne Labelle
Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre
Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault
Easter
Eyking
Foote
Freeman
Galipeau
Garneau
Garrison
Genest
Genest-Jourdain
Giguère
Godin
Goodale
Gravelle

Groguhé
Hassainia
Hughes
Jacob
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
MacAulay
Marston
May
McGuinty
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nicholls
Papillon
Péclet
Plamondon
Rae
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scott
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Stoffer
Toone
Trudeau
Valeriote– — 121

Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hsu
Hyer
Julian
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
Mai
Mathyssen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Pilon
Quach
Rafferty
Raynault
Rousseau
Scarpaleggia
Sellah

St-Denis
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Aspin
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Glover
Goodyear
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Baird
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Goguen
Gourde
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shipley
Sopuck
Stanton
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Vancouver South)

Norlock
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Shea
Smith
Sorenson
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Zimmer– — 142

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

It being 6:44 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

● (1845)

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from October 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-424, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (contestation of election and punishment), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and speak on Bill C-424, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (contestation of election and punishment).

Since the last election on May 2, 2011, a lot of information has come to light about some of the actions that took place during that election. It shows the serious need for this bill.

This bill's proposed purpose, as explained in the summary, is to amend the Canada Elections Act to increase the fines for certain offences under the act. It also permits the Chief Electoral Officer to contest the election of a candidate. In other words, it gives the Chief Electoral Officer standing to take action where he or she sees fit.

Why is there a need for such a bill? Let us look at some of the examples. Daily in the House we see the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs failing to answer questions on events that happened in his riding. He sits on his hands. He claims he is going to outline those concerns and address them next Tuesday in his riding. We will have to wait and see. That is one example.

Another example is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the member for Peterborough, who finds his spending actions in turmoil.

The third point I would make is that the former parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, the member for Nepean—Carleton, stands in his place daily to defend the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Every time that member stands up, I am reminded of the in-and-out scandal of the previous election. That member never talks about the results of the in-and-out scandal and what happened, including the fact that the Conservative Party was fined $50,000 and had to pay back $260,000 for overspending.

The fourth example I would use is that quite a number of the results in a number of Conservative ridings are being challenged before the courts by the Council of Canadians. Actually, there are too many for me to name in my remarks; I would end up not being able to talk about the bill. There are quite a number of challenges now before the courts.

As these examples show, there is a need for some mechanism, a known mechanism, to clearly show candidates running in an election —and that is every candidate, because I do not just want to pick on the Conservatives here—that funny business during an election will not be tolerated, and that there are serious fines in place if such behaviour is proven.

What this bill really does is to put a mechanism in place to give some legislative teeth for action to be taken if there is a problem on the part of a candidate during an election. That would clearly be known prior to elections, and so it certainly should hold candidates more to account.

I will now turn to what those actions are in Bill C-424.

● (1850)

Although I think it is far superior to the American system where so much money was spent in the election, even in our system money still makes a difference. A prime example of that, for the Conservatives who are here in the House, is that the reason for the overspending by the Conservatives by way of the in and out scandal was to use more national advertising to attack and undermine the leadership of the other parties, mainly the leadership of our party. That is why the in and out scandal was invented. It was so they could overspend. While our system is superior, money still does talk.

When we think there is a problem at the national level, certainly the national parties have more means with which to challenge it. However, when there is overspending in a riding or skulduggery happens during an election at the riding level, many candidates do not have the means to challenge that overspending. They just do not have the money to do it.

I will use a recent example just to pinpoint how serious this is.

We are all aware that there was a challenge to the results and the activities in the riding of Etobicoke Centre. Those election results were upheld by the Supreme Court. However, I am not talking about the complaint as such, but the amount of money it took to challenge that in the Supreme Court. The individual who challenged, in that case, had the means with which to do so, but it was in the range of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Therefore, it is easy to see that a number of candidates running would not have the financial means to challenge election results before the courts.

As was said by our leader in his remarks earlier, the cost should not limit the rights of citizens to ensure that the democratic process was conducted fairly. By adding the Chief Electoral Officer to the list of people who can contest an election, we are making it possible for Canadians who cannot afford this process to have another outlet for due process. It is a simple change to the act that says, in instances where election fraud is suspected, the Chief Electoral Officer can pursue it through the courts. The onus should not be on everyday Canadians to come up with vast amounts of money to protect democracy.

In this country, we want to see ordinary Canadians running for office to represent constituents in this place. It should not only be money and those who are backed with money that talk. We put limits on riding spending. We put limits on candidate spending. However, if there is election fraud, or a strong suspicion of election fraud, those citizens need the right and ability to challenge those decisions without facing bankruptcy for having challenged them.

By providing the Chief Electoral Officer with the standing to contest an election, we are putting in place a further safeguard to our democracy. That is what is important. We need to safeguard our democracy. The bill is quite simple in terms of its wording and the changes to be made, but it is quite dramatic in terms of the impact it could have on ordinary Canadians who stand for election. If there is election fraud, they would be able to challenge it.

My last point is that the penalties are there to be seen and could be imposed on those who would get involved in election fraud. I ask the House to support the bill. It is needed for our democracy.

● (1855)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the speech from the member for Malpeque. Most of what he said is well worth taking on board. However, in the first hour of debate, we heard a fair bit, including from the side of the governing party, about a concern that the mechanism being selected in Bill C-424 for an additional way to contest elections through the Chief Electoral Officer would involve the Chief Electoral Officer in almost a politicization of his role, that there would not be sufficient neutrality with that mechanism.

The concerns being presented from the governing side were real, in the sense that within the structure of the Canada Elections Act there is a reason to be concerned about whether this is the appropriate mechanism. At the same time, it is important that we actually hear in committee whether the mechanism of using the Chief Electoral Officer to trigger a contestation could actually work. As the sponsor for the bill did note, there are at least three jurisdictions in Canada, those being Ontario, B.C. and Nunavut, that give the power to the equivalent of the Chief Electoral Officer to contest elections. Somehow or other in those jurisdictions, the problem of political neutrality was not seen as a barrier. That said, we do not appear to have a lot of experience with this mechanism to draw upon. There are no controversies, but also no strong indications that if this were ever to be invoked in those jurisdictions there might not be problems.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, most of our members would be keen to support this bill going to committee, but we are not at all committed at this early stage to this being the right mechanism.

Some suggestions have been raised that maybe the best mechanism is to piggyback on a mechanism that already exists in the Canada Elections Act, which is a referral from the Chief Electoral Officer, in certain instances, to the Commissioner of Canada Elections. That is in the context of various listed offences where the Chief Electoral Officer refers a matter to the Commissioner of Canada Elections to conduct an inquiry, and from that point forward it is up to the Commissioner of Canada Elections to determine whether to go further. There is a linkage there that would suggest that maybe one way of mitigating the concern about politicization is to give the Chief Electoral Officer a role but basically hand over the heavy lifting to the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

The problem is that while this provides something to be built upon, it is not an off-the-shelf mechanism. As it exists now in the Canada Elections Act, under section 510, the Chief Electoral Officer, when he or she refers to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, it is only with respect to offences. The whole idea is to start a possible prosecutions path within the Elections Canada Act. It is not at all about contestation of elections. Something would definitely have to be reworded by way of amendment to the current Bill C-424, if that linkage mechanism were to be chosen instead of the pure mechanism of allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to do the challenging without any role for the commissioner.

There could be another way to go, and that would be that within the current Bill C-424, where the words "the Chief Electoral Officer" have been inserted in proposed subsection 524(1) of the Canada Elections Act, to add "the Chief Electoral Officer" as one actor who could challenge an election. It would simply substitute the words "the Chief Electoral Officer" with "the Commissioner of Canada Elections", and give that role directly to the commissioner without any role at all for the Chief Electoral Officer.

I am not saying, one way or the other, that having the Commissioner of Canada Elections involved would be preferable to having the Chief Electoral Officer as the trigger for contestation for elections. However, we owe it to the structure of the act itself to look at that possibility.

● (1900)

It turns out that the Canada Elections Act is the only elections act within Canada among all the jurisdictions that has this actor, the Commissioner for Elections Canada, and there is, by virtue of that, a certain logic within our federal act where the Chief Electoral Officer probably does benefit from a greater degree of distance from the enforcement process than exists in any of the other acts within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. If that is the case, it might be that for the federal act, it is more problematic to have the Chief Electoral Officer play this role.

The point is that we could benefit by going to committee to look exactly at what the best mechanism would be. We would be able to learn if there were other mechanisms, for example, in use elsewhere outside of provincial or territorial jurisdictions that might be more suitable or more effective. Indeed, if we learned that, we might well determine that those mechanisms could not be turned to and inserted by way of amendment because they would fall well outside the immediate scope of the bill. However, we would have ended up learning enough, even if we rejected Bill C-424 after the committee stage, to assist the government, perhaps, in determining a mechanism that it could put forth within legislation, legislation I would like to think is under way or close to being tabled by the government. In March of this year the government agreed in a unanimous motion sponsored by the NDP to table elections legislation on certain aspects of the running of elections, yet we have not seen that legislation.

Let us just say that it is very likely that somewhere in the civil service the makings of an election act amendment bill is there and if it takes that much longer, having some committee hearings on Bill C-424 can only help inform government members' consideration of what should go in the government bill.

I would make brief note, without going into detail, that south of the border is a very different model from contesting elections at the moment in our electoral act. We have candidates or electors from the riding in question having the right to challenge an election result. South of the border also there is a list of candidates, electors, et cetera, who have that same kind of right, but all of it is channelled into a very different model whereby there is an independent set of actors, like an elections committee, and then it goes to an election commission and the courts do not get involved until the very end at the review stage.

There might be something to be said for the U.S. model, which again I doubt very much we could bring into the bill by way of amendment, but we might learn that it is a better approach than what has been proposed.

Probably more important in the times we find ourselves, and this is where I would refer back to the speech by the member for Malpeque, we are living in times when we are more and more aware, and let us put it as delicately as we can, of a fair bit of evidence of shenanigans which has come to our attention in the last year or so, especially with respect to the May 2011 federal election. We basically have to consider that we have some evidence now of the costs. This is the first point from the sponsor of the bill that the costs of contesting an election are serious.

The member for Malpeque talked about the specific case of Etobicoke Centre, but I think it is also important that we know that a number of citizens are currently contesting a number of riding results in the 2011 election. I think there might be five ridings or there might be more. Even before the matter had gone to federal court, something like $240,000 had already been spent before getting to court, where it currently is.

Also the second point is that fraud that is common to multiple ridings is something that is much more likely to be caught by a centralized public actor like the Chief Electoral Officer, or the Commissioner of Elections Canada. They are more likely to perceive commonalities occurring across ridings and be able to efficiently compare and marshal the evidence.

Finally, a third factor we have to keep in mind if this ever does go to committee is the Supreme Court case that just came down in Etobicoke Centre where vigilance against disenfranchisement was the leitmotif, the central point of reasoning in the judgment and how it was that voter suppression actually fitted the problem that the court was more concerned about than the irregularities that were actually before the court in the case at hand.

● (1905)

We have to be aware of everything we have learned about allegations of voter suppression in the last election and understand that the bill before us is meant to achieve a purpose. We would like to see it go to committee, whatever the result thereafter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-424, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (contestation of election and punishment). I want to thank and congratulate the hon. member for Beauséjour, who is the sponsor of this commendable private member's bill.

Bill C-424 has to do with a fundamental pillar of our democracy: the electoral process. As legislators, we have a duty to preserve the integrity of our democratic system. We must cherish and appreciate the good fortune we have of living in a country where fair and free elections are held on a regular basis. Unfortunately, as with everything, some people abuse our system and try to get around the rules that are in place. These malicious people have to be punished in a way that fits their crimes. That is what Bill C-424 tries to do, in part.

Some unfortunate events presumably took place during the last general election on May 2, 2011. I am talking about what is commonly referred to as the robocall scandal. This bill seems to me to have been motivated by this disgraceful incident. This type of fraudulent tactic undermines the public's trust in the electoral system. Something must be done to regain that trust. This bill will help to do that. I would like to talk about the specifics of Bill C-424, so that those watching at home can understand what we are talking about today.

First, Bill C-424 amends paragraphs 500(5)(*a*) and 500(5)(*b*) of the Canada Elections Act to multiply the fines for some offences by 10. The fines will thus increase from $2,000 to $20,000 for summary convictions and from $5,000 to $50,000 for indictments.

The type of offences covered by paragraphs 500(5)(*a*) and 500(5)(*b*) include delaying or obstructing the electoral process; offering or accepting a bribe; compelling or intimidating a person to vote or refrain from voting for a particular candidate; acting as an election officer without being one; wilfully making a false declaration; exceeding or evading election advertising expense limits; disclosing the vote of a voter one has helped; intentionally and prematurely spoiling an advance ballot; wilfully failing to declare a candidate elected; and wilfully conducting election advertising using government means of transmission. There are thus a number of offences.

This bill affects individuals, voters, election officers—including returning officers—polling companies, candidates, registered associations, party leaders and political parties in general. The types of offences covered by the harsher penalties generally have to do with wrongdoing that could seriously undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process in Canada.

This bill imposes harsher penalties for intentional offences, when a political party, association, voter, election officer, candidate, party leader or individual intentionally breaks the law. Here, the emphasis is on the word “intentionally”. Anyone who intentionally interferes with the electoral process deserves a harsh sentence.

We are not talking about minor mistakes committed accidentally by a campaign volunteer, for I would not want to dissuade anyone who might want to get involved in volunteer work for a political party, but who might fear getting slapped with a $20,000 fine. That would be unacceptable. Rather, we are talking about premeditated fraud committed by organized individuals using sophisticated means to break the law.

At the same time, these offences seriously undermine not only the legitimacy of the democratic process, but also our own legitimacy as the elected representatives of the Canadian public. It is important to note that Bill C-424 does not create any new offences. It merely increases fines. Admittedly, monetary penalties ranging from $2,000 to $5,000, as they currently stand, are pretty minimal.

As a result of the uncertainty caused by the robocall scandal, it is crucial that individuals who want to violate the Canada Elections Act for partisan purposes be punished severely. The NDP believes that, given the offences targeted by the bill and the importance of maintaining the integrity of our electoral system, it is in the public interest to impose fines that reflect the seriousness of the crimes committed. Fines that are increased tenfold would be a good way to discourage anyone who might consider deliberately breaking the law for partisan purposes.

Second, the bill seeks to increase the powers of the Chief Electoral Officer. The NDP supports this initiative to give the Chief Electoral Officer the authority to contest an election if he or she notes any irregularities. We do believe, however, that this needs to be explored further in committee. As my hon. colleague from Toronto—Danforth just mentioned, we do have some concerns regarding this measure to increase the powers of the Chief Electoral Officer.

● (1910)

At present, only an elector who is eligible to vote in a given riding or a candidate in that same riding can file a complaint with the Commissioner of Canada Elections if he or she feels there are any irregularities.

When there are reasonable grounds to believe that the law has been broken, the Commissioner of Canada Elections can refer the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who decides whether or not to prosecute. Generally, a lengthy process ensues and can last several months or several years.

By allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to act alone, we are simplifying the process a bit. Our support for granting the power of contestation to the Chief Electoral Officer complements the motion we moved last winter on enhancing the powers of the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Canada. We believe that this measure is good because such legal processes take a lot of time and money. My two colleagues mentioned this earlier, but just look at Etobicoke Centre, where it took a very lengthy process before a decision could be made. The average person probably would not get involved in such lengthy legal wrangling.

However, the Chief Electoral Officer has the necessary resources for such processes. What is more, it would be easier to contest elections in a greater number of ridings, in the event of widespread electoral fraud, as in the case of the robocalls, which affected several ridings. It would be difficult to have a voter or a candidate from every riding contest the election. Contestation would be easier if only one agency could contest several ridings at a time, in cases of widespread fraud.

Some government members have expressed concern over the Chief Electoral Officer's partiality if he had such contestation powers. That is why we believe that it would be worth asking him the question in committee. That is one of the reasons why we support the bill at second reading. We will have to see how this bill can be improved in committee.

As my colleague mentioned, we also have some concerns. If the Chief Electoral Officer had more powers, then things would have to be regulated a little more. Under specific circumstances, where there is clear evidence of irregularities, contestation could be possible, but only after the implementation of a specific process whereby the Chief Electoral Officer would show that he has tangible evidence related to a fraudulent situation.

My colleague from Beauséjour pointed this out in his opening speech on October 3:

> This approach is entirely consistent with other electoral systems in Canada such as in British Columbia, Ontario and Nunavut, where the chief electoral officers are able to contest the election result in a particular electoral district.

Therefore, the precedent for such power has already been set in two provinces and one territory. As I mentioned earlier, we must ask the Chief Electoral Officer this question when the bill is at committee stage. I hope he will attend with the support of the government.

In the interests of thoroughness, Bill C-424, which was introduced by the member for Beauséjour, deserves to be examined in more detail in committee. The bill is a good starting point, but we must continue to improve it.

The NDP supports sending this bill to committee. I hope that the Conservatives will also support it, which would allow for more in-depth study. It speaks to the integrity of our democratic system. I would be shocked if the Conservatives were to vote against the bill.

We anxiously await the committee's findings. This is a matter of public interest. The many allegations of wrongdoing during the last election clearly illustrate that this harms democracy in Canada. In light of the recent election scandals, we must take immediate steps to improve the Canada Elections Act and to regain the trust of Canadian voters. It is our duty, and this bill is a good start.

● (1915)

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. speaker, imagine how surprised I was to learn that the famous Pierre Poutine was from my riding. What an honour it was to find my region on page one of the major newspapers. What a pleasure it was to learn that hidden behind a name normally used for a high-calorie meal from these parts was a heart of stone, a pebble in the shoe of the march towards democracy. Pierre Poutine and the robocalls, what a story.

While there may be a humorous side to all of this, it should not be forgotten that this crisis still taints the results of the most recent election and undermines voter confidence.

I have often wondered why my riding was picked to set in motion what was to become one of the greatest crises of trust in our electoral system. Mostly, I asked myself how we could improve that system.

Here today, I would like to speak on behalf of greater electoral transparency and to deter future scandals. Although Pierre Poutine supposedly comes from my riding, we all know that he has probably never enjoyed his eponymous dish at the local Henri restaurant. If the goal of those who caused the scandal was to use robocalls in a riding where the Conservatives had no chance of winning, I can reassure them that they have no more chance of winning now than they had before the last election.

At any rate, the fact is that Pierre Poutine still cannot rest easy. The scandal could surface again in one of the ridings that the Conservatives actually care about. How about a Brian Smoked Meat, a Lolita Steak Haché or a Roland Pâté Chinois?

To prevent the recurrence of scandals like these, Bill C-424 contains some worthwhile solutions. As Pierre Poutine's member of Parliament, I will explain some reasons for supporting the bill at this point and give my recommendations for the next steps.

The current trend is towards widespread voter cynicism. It can indeed be difficult to find enough good reasons to go and vote given the various forms of electoral fraud that people are talking about. People have a right to expect that political parties should meet a number of essential criteria, including integrity, transparency, honesty and the desire to serve the public good. In view of these expectations, it is fully understandable that some people are reluctant to take the trouble to vote. That is why in my view Bill C-424 is a step in the right direction. It would increase the level of trust that people have in their political institutions.

While cynicism is a problem that can be combatted by adding safeguards to the electoral system, it will take more than just holding candidates to account to eliminate all the forms of fraud that currently affect the system. At the moment, an individual or an organization can challenge the validity of an election, but the ensuing legal action can take months or even years. In the meantime, any candidates who have been challenged will continue to sit, meaning that they are still entitled to talk about and vote on bills that will affect people's everyday lives.

If Canadians find that legislation can be voted on by people whose very presence in the House is being challenged, how can they be expected to abide by these laws? Needless to say, it is all part and parcel of everyone's social contract. If everyone is prepared to comply with existing laws, it is because they have been enacted in accordance with a democratic process and, in the end, they contribute to the welfare of the community. It would be ill advised to attempt to breach any of the clauses in our social contract.

Another point in favour of Bill C-424 is that it provides for some serious fines. At the moment, anyone convicted of fraud has to pay a fine of $2,000 to $5,000. When the spending involved in an election is taken into consideration, such fines can hardly be considered a deterrent, particularly in view of the fact that since 1992, 68 people have been convicted of such offences.

● (1920)

This can be considered a large number of convictions given the number of elections that have been held. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that the people in question have only a very small fine to pay. There might have been far more convictions if Canada's Chief Electoral Officer had the power to draw up legislation against irregularities. Who is in a better position than the Chief Electoral Officer to identify irregularities? It would therefore be appropriate to give him all the resources required to legislate against improper conduct while remaining appropriately independent of any political allegiance.

It is also worth repeating that the Chief Electoral Officer himself argued that the current sanctions are insufficient to deter those who commit fraud. As an Université de Montréal graduate put it:

> The current punishments do not fit the crime. For example, some aspects of the law may lead to prosecution, yet administrative sanctions would be more effective and could be implemented more quickly.

In my view, we should remember that the Chief Electoral Officer himself is aware of the weakness of the rules currently in force. It is now up to the government to decide whether the Chief Electoral Officer should be given broader powers to address the situation. Are we to allow Canada to continue to vacillate on such an essential issue? I believe that Bill C-424 is a step in the right direction, as it raises the fines from $2,000 to $5,000 to $20,000 to $50,000. That should be enough to make any party member as ungentlemanly as the so-called Pierre Poutine think twice.

Following the robocalls scandal, the Conservatives supported the NDP motion on strengthening the powers of Elections Canada last spring. Bill C-424 is an opportunity for the House of Commons to work together to eliminate election fraud and enhance the exercise of democracy. That is why I am eagerly looking forward to having this bill discussed in committee to get Canadians interested once again in participating in democracy.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 21, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

CULTURE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to have the opportunity to speak this evening about a topic that is extremely important to my province of Manitoba. It is particularly important to francophones in this province, but also to all Manitobans and francophones in western Canada.

In recent months, I have risen a number of times in this House to ask the government to reconsider its decision to change the funding formula for French-language newspapers, which will cause the Manitoba paper *La Liberté* to lose 50% of its funding in 2013.

La Liberté is the oldest French-language newspaper in western Canada. This newspaper shares the stories of Franco-Manitobans and people, like me, who learned French at a young age in French immersion. This newspaper makes the connection between a rich culture and a rich language, which were founding elements of our region. It gives a contemporary take on the everyday lives of Franco-Manitobans. We must not lose this link between history and the present day.

In Manitoba, we are very proud of our diversity and of the fact that it takes work to promote this diversity. Recently, in the past two decades, Manitoba has seen a huge increase in the number of students and young people who want to learn French in both the French-language and French immersion education systems.

A number of immigrants from French-speaking countries have found that they can use their language and celebrate their diverse cultures in Manitoba.

Our vibrant francophone culture attracts the world, businesses and development to our region. But this is not something that is automatic; it requires investments and a partnership to continue to promote the French language and culture in our province.

I want to know why the federal government will cut funding to *La Liberté*. I urge it to reconsider this decision, which will really hurt the francophone community in my province of Manitoba.

● (1925)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to support almost 900 Canadian magazines and community newspapers each year, including about 25 official language minority publications, through the Canada periodical fund.

The Canada periodical fund replaced the former publications assistance program and the Canada magazine fund. The new fund is a major improvement as it is simpler and gives publishers the flexibility to spend funds as they see fit. This is particularly relevant now as it enables publishers also to prepare for and seize opportunities in digital publishing.

The goal of the fund is to ensure that Canadians have access to a diverse range of Canadian community newspapers and magazines, including official language minority publications.

There have been no cuts to the Canada periodical fund. In fact, last year the government re-affirmed its commitment to the newspaper and magazine industries. We confirmed a total of $75.5 million in permanent funding for the Canada periodical fund. This provides funding stability to the industry and allows newspaper and magazine publishers to make long-term plans for their business.

Official language minority papers are an important part of the communities they serve. They are often the only source of local news and information in English or in French in that region.

Many of these papers have been serving their communities for decades, papers such as *La Voix acadienne* from Prince Edward Island, *Le Nord* which serve francophones in northeastern Ontario, and *The Gaspé Spec*.

In recognition of the importance of official language newspapers and their specific needs, the fund has special eligibility requirements in place to improve access to the program. I will just mention the two most important ones.

First, official language publications need to sell only 2,500 copies annually, whereas all other publications must sell at least 5,000 copies to be eligible.

Second, official language minority publications are exempt from having to sell 50% of their circulation. This is a significant exemption because many of these publications distribute a lot of free copies and would not otherwise be eligible for the program.

I am pleased to say that, through the Canada periodical fund, the government has increased its support to official language minority publications and has expanded the number of new recipients into the program.

For the current fiscal year, official language minority publications, both English and French, received $755,000. This is an increase of more than 12% from what they received in 2009.

It is also very encouraging to see that the program is attracting new official language minority publications that were not previously receiving support. In 2010-11, the first year of the Canada periodical fund, 17% of the official language minority publications were new recipients.

● (1930)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that *La Liberté*, as a result of the change in this formula, will lose 50% of its funding, the oldest francophone newspaper in western Canada, a pillar of the francophonie in Manitoba.

There is no two ways about it. Sophie Gaulin, the head of *La Liberté*, has been quoted as saying that it will have a huge impact.

The same change has affected French language newspapers in Alberta; Manitoba, as we have pointed out; Sudbury, Ontario; and Nova Scotia. This is not a good news story. While other publications may be benefiting, the fact that francophone publications in western Canada, particularly that *La Liberté* is losing out, is something that the government must look at.

I do know that the MP in the area, the member for Saint Boniface, has raised this as well. I wish the government would actually listen to the people of Saint Boniface and the people of Manitoba and go back on their cuts to *La Liberté*.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, even though the CPF was launched in 2010-11, the program's new funding formula was not implemented until 2011-12. The amounts received in 2010-11 were the result of a one-time measure to ease the transition to the CPF and are not representative of what should be expected in the future.

The CPF is a new program, having been operating for only two years, and the aid to publishers funding formula for only one year. We are monitoring its performance and gathering feedback from clients and stakeholders, including official language and minority publications.

We are very proud of the investments we have made in arts and culture. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages has been an extraordinary advocate for arts and culture throughout this country. He is very well respected for the investments that he made. We are very proud that we will continue to do so in the economic action plan going forward.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during question period on June 6, 2012, we were in the middle of a debate on the Conservatives' notorious mammoth Bill C-38 and its measures regarding employment insurance reforms.

I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development that day why her government clearly did not consult workers before bringing in its reform. In a democratic society, where elected representatives work for the people, it goes without saying that decisions regarding major changes to social programs should involve anyone who could be directly or indirectly affected by those changes.

It also goes without saying that MPs can and should call upon experts in each field—employment insurance, in this case—since they are the ones who have the specialized skills needed to help MPs make informed decisions. We consult experts when it comes time to introduce bills and when we are examining certain issues in committee that will affect the lives of Canadians.

When it introduced mammoth Bill C-38, the government did not even want to divide the bill, which amended some sixty laws of all sorts, so that the content could be properly examined by the appropriate committees.

The NDP was quick to work with all stakeholders who wanted to be heard on areas affected by Bill C-38 but had to do so outside the regular parliamentary process because the Conservatives did not place any importance on the consultation process, which is nonetheless fundamental to our democracy's health.

Unlike the Conservatives, the NDP always listens carefully to Canadians, experts, stakeholders, businesses, scholars and others. We already know that the Conservatives never consulted unemployed workers, employers in seasonal industries, advocacy groups for the unemployed, unions or workers on a reform that will affect them. And, it is important to note that just going around the table at cabinet does not qualify as a consultation process.

I would also like to once again remind members that the government does not contribute to the employment insurance fund and that the money in that fund belongs to workers and employers.

I would thus like the minister to explain to Canadians why her government is not consulting the people affected by her employment insurance reform, and why her government thinks it has the legitimacy to interfere in the management of a fund that does not belong to it.

If the minister is so convinced that what she is saying is true, then she should provide evidence to back it up. Who was consulted and how many times? How many stakeholders are there? Did she merely consult her Conservative colleagues? What consultation mechanisms were put in place? How much time did the consultations take? What needs of employers and workers were identified during the consultations?

Canadians have the right to know.

● (1935)

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the concerns of the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. She asked whether we consulted with Canadians on the various initiatives set out in Bill C-38, including changes to employment insurance and old age security.

[*Translation*]

I would like to assure the honourable member that our government is listening to Canadians.

[*English*]

The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, the Minister of State for Seniors and myself consulted widely in the lead up to Canada's economic action plan 2012. We regularly travelled across the country to meet stakeholders, including individual citizens, employers, employer associations, labour groups and academics to talk about the training skills, OAS, seniors and, of course, employment insurance.

[*Translation*]

Our government's top priority is the economy, and we are proud that over 820,000 jobs have been created since the end of the economic recession.

[*English*]

Such economic growth is only possible by working in partnership with Canadians. In the summer and fall of last year, I was part of extensive consultations in all regions of the country related to employment insurance and how we set EI rates. This was in addition to the prebudget consultations conducted by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, the Minister of State for Seniors and myself in the lead up to the budget. We heard about EI, the skills gap and the need for better connecting Canadians with available jobs from businesses, labour organizations and Canadians. Consultations are an integral part of our business and provide valuable input for our decision-making process.

[*Translation*]

Input from Canadians allows us to develop programs and policies for all our citizens.

[*English*]

We have invested heavily in skills and training to ensure that Canadians have the skills and training they need to gain employment in the marketplace. However, it is unfortunate that with all of these initiatives that we move forward with, the opposition continues to vote against them again and again.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, NDP consultations are telling an entirely different story. We met with 12 groups that are part of MASSE, a Quebec organization. The Conseil national des chômeurs was not consulted. The unions told us that there were no consultations.

I would not like to use unparliamentary language in the House, but the government should prove that it held consultations.

No one likes this reform. It is obvious that no one was consulted. This government's ideology does not help unemployed workers, claimants or groups, nor does it support local and regional development. What is the purpose of the reform?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, we do listen to what Canadians have to say about our programs and policies. Our government is working to help Canadians find jobs in their local areas that are appropriate to their qualifications.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

We are proud that more than 820,000 jobs have been created since the end of the economic recession.

[*English*]

At the same time, we recognize that there are Canadians who are having difficulty finding work, particularly in the off-season in parts of the country where the economy is based on seasonal industries.

For those who are unable to find employment, employment insurance will continue to be there for them, as it always has been.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a few months ago, I informed the House that 360 workers at the Camoplast factory in Roxton Falls in my riding will lose their jobs in July 2013. That means nearly one-quarter of the people in the town will have to find new jobs.

In the current economic context, it is hard for people to find jobs. There are many factors that make it even more difficult for the Camoplast workers. Many of them are close to retirement, which will make it much more difficult to find a new job.

In reaction to the announcement of the almost complete closure of the factory and the loss of jobs in the industrial sector in general, the Acton local development centre noted that it is becoming increasingly difficult to contain the relocation phenomenon. The number of industrial sector jobs in Canada has plummeted in the past few years because they are being relocated to emerging countries. It is even more difficult when a company that grew and prospered in a region moves so that it can hire workers at lower wages. This phenomenon is affecting many regions of Quebec and Canada.

Obviously, it will be hard for these 360 Camoplast workers to find new jobs, not to mention the 500 employees in the greater area who will be affected by the outsourcing of the BRP assembly plants in Valcourt and Sherbrooke.

I talked to the mayor of Roxton Falls this week to get an update on the plant and the employees. He told me that he was working with the local development centre on finding new contracts for the plant. For now, they do not have any good news to share with the employees.

Ironically, the plant is also struggling with a labour shortage since the employees are leaving their jobs to find other work before the plant closes. I understand why they are doing that. I would do the same if I were them.

In June, I asked the government to explain its plan to protect manufacturing jobs. The Minister of Industry answered with the same talking points we have been hearing for some time now: the government has an economic action plan to create jobs; it encourages investment by lowering taxes and fees; it offers hiring credits for recruitment.

There is nothing in the minister's answer to reassure one-quarter of the people of Roxton Falls, not to mention the families that will be affected by the plant's closure.

Perhaps by asking clearer questions we might get clearer answers. Can the minister tell us which of the Quebec economic development and Canada Economic Development programs the municipality of Roxton Falls can use to attract other contracts to the region and create jobs? Do any programs exist that could meet the needs of this municipality and others that are in a similar situation?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the government's commitment to creating jobs, supporting Canadian manufacturing and at the same time ensuring long-term growth. In an uncertain global economy, this government has continued to stick to our low tax plan of jobs and growth, a plan that is working to serve Canadians well. Our economic action plan is focused on jobs and long-term growth and competitiveness of our industries. Our measures support companies, including those in the manufacturing sector, by reducing corporate taxes, investing in innovation and reducing regulatory burden on businesses.

Since 2009, this government has eliminated all tariffs on imported machinery and equipment and the manufacturing inputs to make Canada a tariff-free zone for industrial manufacturers, the first in the G20. We have reduced the corporate income tax rate to 15% from 21% in 2007. As we know, such measures are important to attract investment to Canada and allow companies to access the required capital to grow and create jobs.

We have seen the results of our actions. Canada has been ranked first among the G7 in terms of tax competitiveness, and our economic output is well above pre-recession levels, with over 820,000 jobs created since July 2009. It is now more than 390,000 above its pre-recession peak. More than 90% of all these jobs created since July 2009 have been in full-time positions. More than 75% are in the private sector and about two-thirds are in high-wage industries.

We know that communities and workers in special circumstances need support as well, and we are delivering on that for Canadians in all regions. For those communities that are vulnerable because of their dependence on a single employer or a sector facing challenges, let me remind the member that this government allocated $1 billion for community development in 2008. This was at a time when the recession was at its peak. This funding provided real assistance to create opportunities for workers and communities.

Since we took office, this government has consistently introduced measures that are aimed at setting the right conditions for our companies and manufacturers to sustain growth and create jobs. I can assure the hon. member that we are still focused on jobs. This is the centre of our plan. With the global economic recovery still fragile, we must continue to focus on economic growth and stay the course to create more jobs and a stronger economy.

● (1945)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I am extremely disappointed. While I have a great deal of respect for my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, I would have liked to hear a clear answer from the minister responsible for this file. I cannot hide the fact that I am disappointed.

I am also very disappointed by the kind of empty answers we are hearing in this House, empty answers to pertinent questions dealing with the quality of life enjoyed by Canadians. While we are asking pertinent questions on the programs available and on what this government intends to do to preserve high-quality jobs in Canada, all we get in response are talking points. I am sure that they did not even bother to consult the file I suggested regarding the plant in my riding that is about to shut down.

That is all I have to say. I am extremely disappointed by the response I heard here this evening.

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, our government is taking significant actions that support manufacturing. We have introduced measures to foster a healthy investment climate, spur innovation, create jobs and drive economic growth. We have reduced taxes, eliminated tariffs on machinery and introduced a hiring credit to help small businesses recruit employees. These measures are supporting companies and manufacturers to grow and create jobs for Canadians.

We have the strongest rate of employment growth, by far, and have ranked first in terms of tax competitiveness among the G7 countries. Our measures stimulate the economy and create one of the most inviting investment climates in the world. Our measures also boost innovative activities while driving the growth of our companies and allowing them to continue to create jobs.

Further, this government is facilitating access to capital so that companies, including manufacturers, can get their ideas off the ground and into the marketplace. In our last budget, we allocated half a billion dollars to provide early stage risk capital and create a large-scale venture capital fund. We have strong economic fundamentals that are the envy of the world and will continue to make it easier for all businesses to grow and create jobs in Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:48 p.m.)

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