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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 27, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 27, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 13 petitions.

* * *

MUSEUMS ACT

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-49, An Act to amend the Museums Act in order to establish the Canadian Museum of History and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources entitled "Resource Development in Northern Canada".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

I want to commend all members of the committee for putting together a report that really does reflect what witnesses said, and will lead to better things for this industry in the future.

PETITIONS

ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by numerous residents of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and many other parts of the province in support of Bill C-398.

The petitioners are calling upon the House to pass Bill C-398 without significant amendment to facilitate the immediate and sustainable flow of life-saving, generic medicines to developing countries.

This is a reform to Canada's access to medicines regime, which is intended to provide affordable, life-saving, generic medicines to developing countries. However, the provisions were unnecessarily complicated and the regime has been used only once. To provide for this, there needs to be reform. This needs to happen. It is a part of the drugs for all campaign, which deserves consideration by this House.

MOTHERWELL HOMESTEAD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two sets of petitions to file today. There are three petitions signed by hundreds of people from all across Saskatchewan with respect to the historic Motherwell Homestead, the national historic site near Abernethy, Saskatchewan.

These petitioners are commenting on the huge importance of that historic site and calling upon the Government of Canada to continue funding for the Motherwell Homestead.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second set of petitions, again signed by hundreds of people from across Saskatchewan and, in this case, from different parts of the country as well, draw to the attention of the House the importance of the Prairie shelterbelt program and the historic tree farm at Indian Head, which has been functioning there since 1901.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to continue adequate funding for the shelterbelt program and for the tree farm.

ABORTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present, on behalf of constituents, a petition calling for some restrictions to be put on abortion in Canada.

The petitioners note that Canada is the only country in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, when it comes to having no restrictions on abortion legislation.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

[*Translation*]

GATINEAU PARK

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House to present a petition signed by many people entitled “Together, let’s protect Gatineau Park”. The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to pass legislation to provide Gatineau Park with the legal protection it needs to preserve it for future generations.

[*English*]

ABORTION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to the House of Commons, signed by a number of petitioners mainly from Orangeville in my riding, but also from Grand Valley, Waldemar and Hillsburgh.

The petitioners are saying that whereas Canada is the only nation in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, without any laws restricting abortion; and whereas Canada’s Supreme Court has said it is Parliament’s responsibility to enact abortion legislation, these petitioners call upon the House of Commons in Parliament assembled, to speedily enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to table a petition organized by the Grandmothers’ Advocacy Network.

The grandmothers point out that in sub-Saharan Africa their sister grandmothers are burying their adult children and caring for many of the 15 million children who have been left orphaned by AIDS.

The petition talks about Canada’s access to medicines regime and says that CAMR was intended to provide affordable life-saving generic medicines to developing countries, but because its provisions are unnecessarily complicated, it has been used only once since 2004.

The petitioners are asking that the new bill that is before the House, Bill C-398, which would correct these problems, be passed with support from across the House. The petitioners are calling upon all MPs to do that work.

* * *

• (1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 959 and 981.

[*Text*]

Question No. 959—**Hon. Denis Coderre:**

With regard to corrections, since January 1, 2000, (a) has any department or agency conducted any review or assessment of physical conditions, practices, policies, or any other matter, pertaining to (i) the Baffin Correctional Centre in Iqaluit, Nunavut, (ii) correctional services in Nunavut in general; and (b) what are the details, including dates and file numbers, of each review or assessment?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Public Safety Canada has not conducted any review or assessment pertaining to the Baffin Correctional Centre or any other correctional services in Nunavut. This is a territorial institution, not a federal institution.

With regard to the Correctional Service of Canada and (a)(i) specifically, since January 1, 2000, the CSC has not conducted any review or assessment of physical conditions, practices, policies, or any other matter, pertaining to the Baffin Correctional Centre in Iqaluit, Nunavut. This is a territorial institution, not a federal institution.

With regard to (a)(ii), in April 2012, in accordance with the provisions of the exchange of service agreement, ESA, between CSC and the Territory of Nunavut, a review of the ESA was completed to enable CSC to measure the results achieved against objectives set forth in the ESA.

With regard to (b), this review focused on the continued relevance of the ESA, whether the agreement is effective in meeting its objectives within budget and without unwanted outcomes, whether it is cost effective, and whether it has been implemented as designed.

While this review did not focus solely on territorial corrections, it did conclude that the goals and objectives of the territory are consistent with CSC and that initiatives and practices in Nunavut have enhanced Inuit programs and services for federal offenders.

The details, including dates and file numbers of each discussion between CSC and the Government of Nunavut, are not readily available.

With regard to the RCMP, it has not conducted any review or assessment pertaining to the Baffin Correctional Centre or any other correctional services in Nunavut. This is a territorial institution, not a federal institution.

Question No. 981—**Mr. Jean Rousseau:**

With regard to the programs of the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec: (a) for each program, (i) have there been any changes in the eligibility criteria, (ii) if so, what are they, (iii) how much is the budget for 2012-2013, (iv) is this a decrease from the 2011-2012 budget, (v) if so, by how much; (b) since the start of the current fiscal year, for each of Quebec’s administrative regions, (i) how many proposals have been submitted, (ii) how many proposals have been rejected, (iii) what was the amount of each proposal submitted, (iv) what was the amount of each proposal rejected, (v) what was the amount of each proposal approved, (vi) how many co-operatives have submitted a proposal, (vii) how many proposals submitted by a co-operative have been rejected, (viii) how many non-profit organizations have submitted a proposal, (ix) how many proposals submitted by a non-profit organization have been rejected, (x) how many rejected proposals had been recommended by a regional office, (xi) what were these proposals, (xii) which organizations, businesses or co-operatives have submitted a proposal, (xiii) what have been the application processing times; (c) how many positions have been cut in each regional office; (d) how many positions have been cut at headquarters; (e) how many have been transferred from one office to another; and (f) from which office to which office have the transfers referred to in (e) occurred?

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, with regard to (a), no changes were made to the eligibility criteria of any of the programs of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, including the community futures program, the program to fund the construction of a gas pipeline between Vallée-Jonction and Thetford Mines, and the Quebec economic development program, launched on April 1, 2012.

Budget information on the agency's programs can be found in the report on plans and priorities at the following addresses: for 2011-12, <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2011-2012/inst/frd/st-ts01-eng.asp>, and 2012-13, at <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2012-2013/inst/frd/st-ts01-eng.asp>.

With regard to (b), information related to submitted and rejected projects could be considered third party confidential information under the Access to Information Act and thus cannot be disclosed. Information related to disclosed projects can be found in the proactive disclosure section of the agency's website at <http://www.dec-ced.gc.ca/eng/disclosure/grant-contribution-awards/quarters.html>.

The agency's service standards require between 35 and 65 days to process a complete application from the day it is submitted until an answer is rendered.

With regard to (c) to (f), in view of the current state of the global economy, the government has to make a special effort to re-establish its budgetary position.

The agency contributes to the government's goal of attaining a balanced budget by simplifying its programs and clients' reporting, reducing its processing times and cutting red tape, and reorganizing its internal services for greater efficiency.

The agency's contributions budget will return to much the same level as before the allocation of temporary programs.

The agency's mandate to promote the economic development of Quebec's regions remains aligned with the government's priorities of the economy and employment. Its approach is geared to the challenges and assets of businesses and regions to enable them to participate fully in the economy.

The agency will continue to support the economic development of Quebec's businesses and regions while enhancing client services and will continue to be present locally to work with organizations and partners.

To serve its clientele more effectively with advisers who are even more present in the field and to enhance its efficiency, the agency has consolidated its regional expertise according to the following: responsibility for northern Quebec has been assumed by the business office in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, since Val d'Or is a central point of connection with the north; the greater Montreal area is now served by a single business office, which will lead to the development of synergies in the delivery of programs and services in the metropolitan area; promoters from certain regional county municipalities in the Lanaudière, Laurentides and Montérégie regions are

Routine Proceedings

now served by business offices whose socio-economic issues are similar, in order to meet their challenges more effectively.

The impact of these measures on the agency's number of full-time equivalents will be disclosed through the usual reporting mechanisms to Parliament, such as the 2012-13 departmental performance report and the report on plans and priorities for 2013-14.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 958, 960, 966, 973, 974, 977 and 979 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 958—**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:**

With regard to First Nations health: what are the dates, titles and file numbers of all reports, studies, files or dossiers concerning substance abuse or addictions in the communities of Sheshatshiu or Natuashish, created or prepared since January 1, 2006, by or on behalf of (i) Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, (ii) Health Canada, (iii) the Public Health Agency of Canada?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 960—**Hon. Denis Coderre:**

With regard to Aboriginal affairs: what are the titles, dates, and file numbers of any reports, studies, files, or dossiers held by any department or agency, concerning the Labrador Metis Association, Labrador Metis Nation, or NunatuKavut?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 966—**Mr. Sean Casey:**

With regard to torture: (a) what is the government's policy on art. 1(1) of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; (b) is it the policy of the government and its agencies that Canada is opposed to any violation of the article cited in (a); (c) is it the government's policy that s.269.1 of the Criminal Code, including, but not limited to, subsection 4, is consistent with art.1(1) and (2) of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and (d) is it the government's policy that information obtained by means of torture and provided to Canada by a third party deemed a non-state, or provided by a state as defined by the United Nations, is contrary to the article cited in (a) and a potential contravention of Section 269.1 of the Criminal Code?

(Return tabled)

Points of Order

Question No. 973—Hon. Irwin Cotler:

With regard to the government's proposal to double the victim surcharge and limit judicial discretion in sentencing as is currently provided for by section 730 of the Criminal Code, and to eliminate the "undue hardship" defense: insofar as the victim surcharge is used to fund provincial and territorial victims' services, (a) on what data did the Minister of Justice rely in determining the specific amount by which the government proposes to raise the surcharge, in particular, did the Minister rely on data directly provided by (i) the province of Alberta, (ii) the province of British Columbia, (iii) the province of Manitoba, (iv) the province of New Brunswick, (v) the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, (vi) the province of Nova Scotia, (vii) the province of Ontario, (viii) the province of Prince Edward Island, (ix) the province of Saskatchewan, (x) the province of Quebec, (xi) the Yukon, (xii) the Northwest Territories; (b) did the Minister rely on data either provided or collected by the provinces or territories, (i) if so, did the Minister rely on data from the provinces and territories, (ii) did the government request this data from the provinces or was it provided to the government voluntarily, (iii) what individual or agency was responsible for the collection and analysis of any data regarding provincial and territorial victim services funds, (iv) has the government engaged in any dialogue with the provinces, territories, or any other private or public sector organizations involved in the provision of victim services in drafting the proposed amendments; (c) has the government reviewed any data indicating that there is a deficit in funding levels of provincial and territorial victim services programs and, (i) if so, on what basis has the government determined the extent of any deficit in the funding of victim services, (ii) if the government has determined there to be a deficit in the funding of victim services, has it been found to be consistent nationwide or to vary by province or territory, (iii) in reliance on what data has the government determined the doubling of the victim surcharge to be the appropriate level of increase, (iv) where the government has not relied directly on data provided by the provinces or territories, on what basis has any data actually relied on been deemed reliable, (v) insofar as the government has determined there to be a deficit in provincial and territorial victim services funds, on what basis has the government determined increasing the victim surcharge to be a sufficient response, (vi) has the government generated, or relied upon, any data indicating future projections of victims' services funding levels and, (vii) if so, will the doubling of the surcharge amount be sufficient to maintain adequate funding levels of victims' services in all provinces and territories; (d) has the government found any evidence indicating that increasing victim surcharge will affect the accountability of offenders, (i) has the government found any evidence indicating that the increase of the victim surcharge will deter specific offenders from re-offending, (ii) has the government found any evidence indicating that increasing the victim surcharge will have a deterrence effect on crime in general; (e) on what criteria did the government base its proposal to eliminate the "undue hardship" defense currently provided for by section 737(5) of the Criminal Code, and did the government consult with bar associations in deciding to advance this proposal in (i) Alberta, (ii) British Columbia, (iii) Manitoba, (iv) New Brunswick, (v) Newfoundland and Labrador, (vi) Nova Scotia, (vii) Ontario, (viii) Prince Edward Island, (ix) Saskatchewan, (x) Quebec, (xi) the Yukon, (xii) the Northwest Territories; and (f) on what basis did the government determine that it is appropriate to maintain judicial discretion to increase a victim surcharge, pursuant to section 737(3) of the Criminal Code, but not to implement an exemption based on undue hardship pursuant to section 737(5)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 974—Hon. Irwin Cotler:

With regard to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and civil war in Syria: (a) how many Canadian citizens are known to still be in the country, (i) of those, how many are known to be at-risk, (ii) of those at risk, how many have received assistance from Canadian authorities; (b) how many Canadians have returned to Canada from Syria with assistance from the following embassies and via the following countries, (i) Lebanon, (ii) Turkey, (iii) Jordan/Iraq; (c) what measures have the Canadian embassies in (i) Lebanon, (ii) Turkey, (iii) Jordan/Iraq taken with respect to violence and criminal activity across borders; (d) what measures have the Canadian embassies in (i) Lebanon, (ii) Turkey, (iii) Jordan/Iraq taken with respect to aiding Syrian refugees; (e) how many visa requests from Syrian refugees has Canada received since the beginning of the conflict via the embassies of (i) Lebanon, (ii) Turkey, (iii) Jordan/Iraq; (f) which international organizations have government representatives worked with to aid refugees fleeing Syria, and how much funding has been devoted to these since the start of the conflict; (g) what diplomatic steps have the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs taken to protect Syrian civilians from massive assaults and to encourage a peaceful resolution to the conflict while Parliament was adjourned for the summer of 2012; (h) what diplomatic steps will the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs now take in light of the intensified

violence; (i) what steps has the government taken to help break the diplomatic impasse at the United Nations; (j) what efforts have the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Ambassador to the United Nations or other diplomatic officials taken to encourage the United Nations Security Council to refer the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court; (k) will the government support efforts by UN Security Council members to invoke any aspects of the responsibility to protect doctrine, and if so, (i) which ones, (ii) how will this decision be evaluated, (iii) by whom; and (l) does the government support the invocation of the responsibility to protect doctrine to protect the Syrian people and, if so, (i) what steps will it be taking, (ii) when, (iii), what results are expected?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 977—Hon. Irwin Cotler:

With respect to Iran: (a) what criteria does the government use when deciding whether to suspend diplomatic relations with a foreign government; (b) in what way did the government of Iran meet these criteria; (c) who did the government consult in making this decision; (d) what documents did the government consult in making this decision; (e) when was the final decision made; (f) when was the decision-making process initiated; (g) who participated in making this decision; (h) has the government encouraged the governments of other countries to suspend diplomatic relations with Iran and, if so, which ones; (i) what arrangements have been made to serve or assist Canadians who remain in Iran, or who will be in Iran in the future, (i) as residents, (ii) as visitors, (iii) as prisoners; (j) what arrangements have been made to serve or assist Iranians or Iranian-Canadians residing in Canada either permanently or temporarily; (k) what steps does the government take to determine whether an entity will be listed as a terrorist entity and which, if any, of these steps have been taken with respect to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps; (l) if any such steps have been taken, what is the timeline for the completion of the process; and (m) who is involved in making the determination of whether the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps will be listed as a terrorist entity?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 979—Hon. Judy Sgro:

With regard to government employment, how many persons were employed full-time and part-time in each quarter from the first quarter of fiscal year 2006-2007 to the present, broken down by department, agency, crown corporation, or other entity: (a) in each province, territory or location outside Canada; and (b) in each census metropolitan area, and, in the case of Ottawa-Gatineau, the Ontario and Quebec portions of that census metropolitan area?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-377—INCOME TAX ACT

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to Bill C-377, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (requirements for labour organizations), introduced by the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

Government Orders

My hon. colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has already risen in this House to bring to your attention the fact that this bill requires royal recommendation in order to pass. My colleague's arguments were all very clear and perfectly illustrated the NDP's concerns regarding the implications of this bill. I am raising this issue once again here today because some new information has become available to MPs, and I feel I must bring it to your attention as well.

Indeed, and as my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie already mentioned, the Canada Revenue Agency received an order from the Standing Committee on Finance to answer some questions regarding new and distinct funds that will result from Bill C-377 if it is passed. Those answers were sent to the members of the Standing Committee on Finance yesterday. I will submit the document containing those answers following my speech.

First of all, the Canada Revenue Agency confirmed that the new and distinct funds that will result from Bill C-377 were not included in the most recent supplementary estimates, as is always the case with private members' business.

The Canada Revenue Agency also confirmed that this bill will result in expenditures that are not currently authorized by legislation. In response to the third question, the agency said that Bill C-377 amends the Income Tax Act to give the minister authority over these new expenditures.

My colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie also pointed out that clause 1(4) of the bill, which requires the minister to make the information collected available to the public, will also result in new expenditures. The Canada Revenue Agency confirmed this in the answers forwarded to us.

The answer we received today from the agency is that, "Changes will be made to the CRA website to fulfill the requirements of the bill."

The agency even provided an estimate of the costs resulting from system changes. For the Canada Revenue Agency, the estimated incremental costs arising from the required system changes, including changes to the Canada Revenue Agency website, are \$8.5 million for 70 full-time employees in the first two years and \$1 million in subsequent years for nine full-time employees.

These costs represent new expenditures because the Canada Revenue Agency is not currently committed to disclosing the information, as required by the bill. The answers obtained also refute the argument of this bill's sponsor to the effect that the agency is already doing similar work as part of the charities program.

In fact, the agency confirmed that it is not currently committed to disclose such an exhaustive amount of information as required under Bill C-377. This is what the agency had to say in this regard:

The Charities Directorate does not provide partial information to the public. The directorate gathers only the minimum amount of transactional information from registered charities, and not all that information is disclosed.

I would like to close by sharing some information obtained from the agency that says a lot about the new and distinct costs associated with Bill C-377. As it is now worded, the bill requires the implementation of an entire system that includes electronic

processing, validations and automatic posting to the Canada Revenue Agency's website. The estimated incremental cost for the Canada Revenue Agency is \$10.6 million for the first two years, including 91 full-time employees, and \$2.1 million for each consecutive year, including 21 full-time employees. These costs are attributable mainly to information cross-referencing requirements.

• (1015)

It is important to note that these are the estimated costs for 1,000 respondents, but Bill C-377 is written in such a way that it includes all labour organizations and trusts, which represents close to 25,000 tax filers. The costs incurred would therefore be 25 times higher than these estimates.

I believe that it is now clear that Bill C-377 requires a royal recommendation in order to be voted on at third reading since the exorbitant costs that would be incurred by cross-referencing the large amounts of information gathered by the Canada Revenue Agency are new and distinct.

In order to make it easier for you to examine this important issue, Mr. Speaker, I will make the answers obtained from the Canada Revenue Agency available to you. I would like to thank you for the attention you will give to this important matter.

The Speaker: I thank the member for her speech.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FIRST NATIONS FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY ACT

Hon. Gary Goodyear (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) moved that Bill C-27, An Act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity on behalf of the constituents of the great Kenora riding to speak, hopefully, for the last time to this piece of legislation before it moves on to the other place and receives royal assent.

[Translation]

I am proud to rise today to once again explain the need for Bill C-27 and to talk about its many benefits.

Before I do, as a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, I want to thank all those who appeared before the committee during recent hearings. Their contributions have made this legislation better and stronger.

Government Orders

The committee heard from a number of witnesses, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, who spoke to the need for Bill C-27. They recognized that increased transparency and accountability will empower first nation members and their governments.

[*English*]

As do all Canadians, first nation community members want assurances that public funds are being used to improve their communities. They expect and deserve sound management practices from their elected leadership, as well as access to the information necessary to ensure that these leaders are acting in their best interests and priorities. Bill C-27 simply puts in place the same types of rules with respect to financial transparency that already apply to other levels of government in Canada. Why should first nations expect or have anything less?

Further, publicly accessible information will also boost investor confidence and create a better business environment for private sector investment on reserve. This will inevitably lead to increased economic opportunities that will help to create the conditions for healthier and more self-sufficient first nation communities.

Chief Darcy Bear of the Whitecap Dakota First Nation said it best when he stated:

You drive through my community, you'll see all the paved roads, paved streets, the good quality of life that my people, my members enjoy.... That's what good accountability brings to a community.

It is worth noting that the bill is entirely consistent with the resolution passed by first nation leadership at the Assembly of First Nations' Special Chiefs Assembly in December of 2010, where the chiefs committed to "Choose to lead by example and demonstrate to other orders of government processes for accountability", which included:

Itemizing and publicly disclosing salaries, honoraria and expenses associated with the operations of Chief & Council;

Ensuring information about community finances and decision-making is easily accessible, and available via the internet where applicable.

That sounds a lot like the wording, spirit and intent of the bill.

Currently, there is no legislative requirement for transparency and accountability from first nation leadership. Under current funding agreements, first nation community members can ask for band-related financial information from their elected leaders, but there is no legislated obligation on the part of the administration to release it. We know that many first nations are already making their financial information public voluntarily. We appreciate that. I think it goes to reducing the amount of suspicion and political turmoil at the community level. However, not all first nation communities are doing this.

When individuals are refused information from their band council they often come to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to ask for the information to be released to them, as we have heard from various witnesses appearing before the standing committee. Some regional offices of the department receive as many as 25 to 30 informal requests each year from first nation members seeking this basic information, which would be readily available to any other constituent or any other Canadian in any other jurisdiction

At committee Phyllis Sutherland, president of the Peguis Accountability Coalition, told committee members about her community. They were unable to access salary and other financial information about their elected band officials. She in fact cited several cases where members were subject to intimidation. She insisted that this type of intimidation must stop and that those in power must be held accountable.

• (1020)

Similar concerns were raised in testimony by Joseph Quesnel, a policy analyst with the Frontier Centre for Public Policy. He presented research data culled from the Aboriginal Governance Index developed by the centre, which revealed that 77% of the first nation members surveyed agreed that salary information for elected officials should be made public and be accessible. However, 25% say this information is not available to their band members.

In addition to the requests for documents, the department also receives allegations and complaints regarding potential mismanagement or the misappropriation of band funds and remuneration of its elected officials. Since January 2011, there have been 1,450 such complaints.

[*Translation*]

The important point is not how many requests the department receives each year for salary information—although there are many—it is the fact that from this government's perspective, even one request is one too many. Members must go to the department for information that should be coming directly from their own first nation. The minister would prefer not to be involved in issues that should be resolved by the community itself.

Bill C-27 removes the minister from the equation by ensuring this financial information is easily accessible to everyone who wants it. It creates a direct line of accountability between first nation leaders and their members.

• (1025)

[*English*]

The concern about accountability extends beyond government and first nation members to investors who might be deterred by a lack of reliable financial data. Bill C-27 would help address this problem by requiring first nation governments to publish annual audited consolidated financial statements, as well as a schedule of chiefs' and councillors' salaries, remunerations and expenses. Clear and consistent publication under Bill C-27 would provide potential investors with a snapshot of a community's financial situation and may lead to further opportunities for partnership and investment.

Government Orders

There has been misinformation spread about the bill by the opposition who opposes our government's efforts to support economic growth, investment and job creation through more accountable and transparent government. I would like to take this opportunity to clear up the misconceptions and explain what Bill C-27 would do.

First, the legislation would not set salary levels for chiefs and councillors. It would remain the first nation's responsibility to set the appropriate level of remuneration for its elected officials. The proposed act would simply ensure that financial information is disclosed to the public. This would provide band members with the information they need to hold their leadership to account. They can then use that information to determine whether funds are being spent for the benefit of the community and whether compensation levels are reasonable and appropriate.

Second, I want to make clear that the act would not require individual businesses owned by the band to publish their detailed financial statements. Rather, Bill C-27 would only require the publication of the first nation's audited consolidated financial statements. These financial statements would include any entities that, according to generally accepted accounting principles or GAP, are to be consolidated with the first nation in its financial statements, including most band-owned businesses. However, information relating to government business enterprises would be highly aggregated and would not be revealing any details that would undermine the competitiveness of their businesses.

[*Translation*]

I want to underline that this is a standard accounting principle. This rule applies to all other government-owned businesses across Canada. We are not asking anything different of first nation communities than we do of any other business or community in Canada.

[*English*]

As members of Parliament, we all fully disclose our salaries and special allowances to the public, as required by the Parliament of Canada Act and the Salaries Act. Not only that, but the Federal Accountability Act of 2006 has also increased the public's access to information about its government's activities and those of its members. Anyone interested in any of this data can find it without even asking. Similar laws are in place at the provincial and territorial level and most of those governments have adopted legislation requiring municipal governments to make these documents public as well.

Equally important, there is nothing in this legislation that would create any additional paperwork for first nation governments. They already produce consolidated financial statements each year, which are audited by independent accredited professional auditors. It is a requirement of their funding agreements with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

[*Translation*]

The legislation simply ensures that some of the critical documents which are already submitted to the department as part of a first nation's funding agreement are made publicly available. This bill

does not ask for anything new, except greater transparency to members.

[*English*]

To be clear, all that Bill C-27 would do is to require first nation governments to meet the same standards. They are the only governments in Canada that do not currently provide this basic level of information to the public, and this bill would fill that legislative gap.

As members can see, we are not proposing radical measures, nor are they onerous in terms of their additional reporting requirements. We have made every effort to make it easy for first nations to comply with this law.

It has been pointed out, for example, that not all first nations have websites. However, the bill fully addresses this point. A first nation will not be required to have its own website as a result of the legislation. If a first nation is not able to publish the information electronically itself, it can ask another organization it is a member of to post it on the community's behalf. Alternatively, the first nation could ask Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to post the information on its behalf.

Of course, it is important to recognize that having these documents published on a website does not fulfill a first nation government's obligation to make copies of financial statements available to its members. Again, many of them already do this by either distributing printed copies to households or making information available in band offices. We heard at committee instances of where a number of communities actually host a forum, somewhat akin to an annual general assembly of its members, where they review these documents.

I also want to reinforce that there have been numerous opportunities to discuss and improve this legislation, first in the context of private member's Bill C-575 introduced in the previous Parliament, and now in the context of Bill C-27.

Over the course of the committee's review of the bill, we heard concerns about how certain sectors of the text might be interpreted. These concerns focused on the language of the bill in two key areas: first, the need to report information relating to remuneration and reimbursement of expenses separately; and second, the treatment of band-controlled entities. I am pleased to say that we have listened to the concerns raised by first nations and have introduced amendments to clarify the relevant language of the bill to address these concerns. That is a process that took place at committee.

With respect to the reporting of remuneration and expenses, the original text of the bill combined the concepts of salaries and expenses into a single definition of remuneration. Although it was not the intention of the bill, we heard from witnesses that this could be interpreted to suggest that these two amounts could be reported and disclosed to the public as one aggregate figure. To make things clearer and for greater certainty, the amendments split these two concepts into two separate definitions for the purposes of the legislation, and the schedule of remuneration has been re-named in the text of the bill to "schedule of remuneration and expenses".

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•(1030)

As it relates to the treatment of band-owned businesses, the intention of the bill has always been to put into legislation the same practices with respect to the treatment of band entities as are currently in place in the funding agreements. We believe it is important for the users of financial statements, especially first nation members, to see summary statements that capture the activities of their government and elected officials.

The entities to be included and the manner in which their financial information is presented will be determined by the standards set out by the Public Sector Accounting Board of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. This will ensure that the standards applying to businesses owned by other governments in Canada will also apply to first nation governments in precisely the same way.

The government worked hard to find language that strikes a balance between the need for precision and certainty in legislative drafting and complex accounting concepts. At committee we adopted an amended definition of consolidated financial statements that makes these points clear. These improvements resulted in some other small amendments but do not detract from the original intent of the bill. The only thing that has changed is the wording, which has been adjusted for clarity, greater certainty and to eliminate any confusion.

[*Translation*]

First nations people have been waiting a long time for the measures proposed in Bill C-27. They should not be asked to wait any longer for this bill to come into effect.

It was first introduced on November 23, 2011, and there has been ample time devoted to discussing views and concerns regarding this legislation. It was debated for almost six hours during second reading debate before being referred to committee, which met seven times to study and discuss Bill C-27.

During that time the committee heard from 21 witnesses from 13 different organizations. These witnesses came from a variety of organizations including the Assembly of First Nations, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada, and representatives from individual first nations communities.

•(1035)

[*English*]

During report stage, the House spent over six hours of debate on this bill. The NDP has had no less than 20 speakers, yet we heard no new issues raised by the opposition in all that time. In fact, one thing that we did hear was one member from across the way saying that he wanted to see one rule for all. It is great news that a member from the NDP would say that, because that is exactly what this bill strives to accomplish.

For this legislation to apply in the next fiscal year, it must come into force on or before March 31, 2013. This legislation is long overdue and will bring first nation governments in line with virtually all other governments in Canada. Our government believes that first nations people have waited long enough. We think this legislation should apply to the next fiscal year, 2013-14. This means that the

publication of first nations' financial statements and salaries and expenses could occur as early as July 2014.

I am very proud of this legislation. I believe firmly that first nations deserve and expect the same level of transparency and accountability as all Canadians. The first nations financial transparency act would make that happen.

Bill C-27 will also reassure potential investors that they can safely enter into joint financial agreements, joint ventures and business undertakings with first nations. The resulting jobs and economic growth will contribute to social and economic improvements in the lives, the livelihoods and the communities of first nation members.

In short, Bill C-27 is a landmark bill that is worthy of the support of all parties. I urge all members of the House to give it their full support and vote unanimously in support of this bill.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it is a bit of a stretch to say that simply by posting audited statements or consolidated financial statements, economic development and autonomy will occur in a community. We already know that many first nations already post that information and are not thriving economically.

As the parliamentary secretary pointed out in his speech, there is already a requirement for first nations to produce this information if they have financial agreements with the federal government. Moreover, if they have a band-owned entity that is incorporated or is in a partnership, there are requirements for audits for them as well. In short, many first nations already produce this information.

Why did the government choose this adversarial, non-consultative approach when it could instead have worked with first nations that are having difficulty complying with the rules already in place? Why did the government not take this latter approach?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and respect the hon. member's contributions to this debate and all of the work that we do at committee. Nonetheless, I am interested in the evolving narrative from the other side.

Here is what we have heard so far as the bill has come through. One member for the NDP has said there should be one rule for all. Bill C-27 actually takes us in that direction. It makes a level playing field for constituents in first nation communities, as would exist in other communities in other jurisdictions.

Second, another member of the NDP said that government is about decision-making and emphasized the ability and right of a given community to participate in that. Having access to financial documents allows community members to exercise their participation in the decisions their elected officials are making.

Now the current member has just said and recognized that this is not an onerous exercise, since they already produce these documents. Indeed, it is not a redundant exercise; it simply means that they have to post the documents on an accessible website or be able to supply them to a community member on request.

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We have these three approaches coming from the NDP. We are encouraged that their signals are strong and that they agree with the central tenets of and practical implementation issues regarding the bill. We look forward to today's vote so that we can move forward and send the bill to the other place.

• (1040)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the parliamentary secretary clarify for the House when first nation chiefs and councillors would begin disclosing their salaries and expenses if Bill C-27 is approved?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I also appreciate this member's important work on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

The legislation would apply to first nations' first complete financial year following royal assent. To the extent that the royal assent is received before the end of March 2013, it would apply to fiscal year 2013-14. First nations would have 120 days following the end of the financial year to publish their audited consolidated financial statements and the schedules and/or notes I referred to in my speech.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to ask a question.

The parliamentary secretary is saying that the department is already obligated to disclose this information. The information is therefore already available to first nations members who request it.

Based on the speech he just gave, I am having a very difficult time understanding why this bill is useful today.

I would like him to explain a specific sentence in his speech. He said that this was going to promote economic growth and job creation. Can he explain to me how putting this information on a website is going to promote job creation and the economic prosperity of first nations?

[English]

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question, because it gives me an opportunity to do two things. First, I would point out that the publication of these documents will also give greater investor confidence to prospective businesses wanting to enter into joint ventures with first nations. This is happening. We are opening small business centres on reserve, with a couple just opening in the great Kenora riding not too long ago. We believe that access by the members of those communities to the documents will help them to participate and talk with their elected leaderships about new business priorities moving forward.

Second, self-governing first nation communities, those that have already entered into agreements, already disclose this. As another member asked in a previous question, there are still some bands that do not do this. We want to bring them all onboard to create transparency and accountability and improve investor confidence.

The only thing I would compare it to is the kind of transparency we would like to see from the other side in telling folks and explaining to them more clearly what their carbon tax is really all about.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech. He knows the issue in depth.

We keep hearing about a couple of things, and “non-consultation” seems to be the mantra from the New Democrats. However, there was significant consultation in the genesis of this legislation, which was from the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

More importantly, what we forget are the people who came to committee to testify about this legislation. Could the member comment on why individual first nations members came to the committee to say why this legislation is so important?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this member's contributions to the aboriginal affairs standing committee.

He is right, and he is fleshing out an issue that I feel very strongly about. Consultation takes several forms. When this bill was a piece of private member's business, there was extensive consultation. However, consultation takes on several different forms. When grassroots community members come to their elected officials to consult with them about an issue or a problem, we are talking about a consultation. Nobody who sits on that committee can deny that we have heard from coalition associations, and that “coalition” word still m'a traumatisé un petit peu.

However, these are organizations that have come together and have said they have concerns. They are consulting the government, and another organization, about what steps they can take to get the government to help them respond to this important and substantial concern that they have.

• (1045)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member about the unfairness of how this act has been written. It is written in a way to serve as a type of disciplining device for first nations communities, almost turning them into compliant actors who are subject to largely unaccountable ministerial sanctions.

However, what really worries me is that the bill would allow, in clause 11, “any person”, not just a first nation member, to apply for disclosure of statements. This kind of standing, or *locus standi*, before a court is a recipe, and it looks like a deliberate recipe, for harassment by crusading organizations or individuals to go after first nations. Why would any person in the country have that right written into the bill?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, with respect, obviously the member's previous life was as a person who was fully vested in teaching and practising the law. I respect his observations, but I do not agree with them. Under current funding agreements there are instances where ministerial sanctions could take place, but they remotely or rarely ever occur. We do not see this legislation as taking us any farther down that path.

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However, with respect to disclosure, any constituents in Canada can go to a given website of their respective government to access these financial documents, except for first nations communities. With respect, that is a substantive element about fairness.

In what appeared to be a rather declivitous trajectory in the narrative of a New Democratic member, that member actually made statements to support our legislation, if you will, simply saying that as a matter of fairness it should be one rule for all and everybody should have access to those documents. It is important for decision-making, prioritizing in the community and the conversation that should occur between a member of a community and its elected officials.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I launch into my speech, there are a couple of points that the parliamentary secretary raised that I have to comment on. First of all, part of the problem the House is facing is that the Conservative government fails to recognize a government-to-government relationship. That is a fundamental principle underlying the opposition to this particular piece of legislation.

The member talked about consultation. However, if the Conservatives truly support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which they claim they do, they would look at section 19 that talks about free, prior and informed consent. First nations from coast to coast are saying there has not been free, prior and informed consent on this piece of legislation.

There is another point around this. I would absolutely agree, everyone in the House agrees and first nations agree, that there does need to be accountability and transparency. However, it is how it happens that is critical to this conversation. We have seen the government, once again, unilaterally impose its vision of what accountability and transparency looks like.

The parliamentary secretary quoted a 2010 resolution from the Assembly of First Nations. I want to quote from a paper from 2006, where the Assembly of First Nations was calling on the Conservative government to work with first nations from coast to coast in developing this kind of accountability and transparency. The Assembly of First Nations had a detailed position paper, which also included the suggestion that:

[First nations-led and first nations-specific institutions] will be needed, as First Nation citizens must be empowered to hold both their local governments and the Government of Canada to account. Such institutions include an Ombudsperson's office, so that individuals have a trusted venue to pursue accountability concerns outside of either the local or federal governments. They would also include a First Nations Auditor General who could both provide ongoing advice to assist FN governments in providing accountability and, at the same time, improve accountability by exposing problems and recommending solutions.

In 2006, first nations had a solution to deal with this. Six years later, we do not have to be dealing with a piece of legislation that is being unilaterally imposed by the Conservative government.

I am not going to go over the full details of the bill because we have now spoken about it a number of times in the House. However, the bill would essentially require audited annual consolidated financial statements; a separate annual schedule of remuneration which would include what is paid to the first nations, and any entity controlled by the first nations, its chief and each of its councillors; an auditor's written report respecting the consolidated financial

statements; and an auditor's report respecting the schedule of remuneration.

Also, as members have already pointed out, there are some punishments if there is a failure by the first nation to comply, such that any first nation member may apply for a court order to the Superior Court; any person, including the minister, may apply for a court order to the Superior Court; and, the minister may develop an appropriate action plan to remedy the breach, which could include withholding funds or terminating a funding agreement.

I neglected to say at the outset that we will continue to oppose the bill rigorously. We did propose a number of amendments to try to improve the bill, including deleting some of the more egregious clauses, but those amendments were not supported.

In an article from *iPolitics* entitled "...the government's hollow embrace of transparency" the author says that "...its call for greater financial disclosure rings hollow coming from a government which is failing the transparency test itself". Of course, it was welcomed to hear the parliamentary secretary talk about embracing the one rule for all. Perhaps the government will now cough up details on some of these following items that have been identified.

The article goes on to say:

Unfortunately, back in Ottawa, the federal government is also proving to be far more opaque than accountable.

In 2011...the interim auditor general, blasted the Conservatives for spending on the 2010 G8/G20 summit. Quoted in the National Post, [he] said: "Rules were broken. Lawyers could have an interesting debate as to whether any laws were broken." [He] criticized the government for having no supporting documentation for the selection of 32 projects in the [gazebo] riding.

In 2012, Auditor General Michael Ferguson took the government to task over its failure to disclose the true cost of purchasing 65 F-35 fighter jets. According to Ferguson, the cost of acquiring the planes over their 20-year life cycle was not \$15 billion, as the government claimed, but \$25 billion.

That estimate was closer to one made in 2011 by Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page. After Ferguson's report, Page told CBC Radio's Evan Solomon that it appeared that one set of books was available inside the Department of National Defense, while another was presented publicly by the government "for communication purposes."

Page, of course, made more headlines this week when he filed a reference application with the Federal Court of Canada to gain access to details of the federal government's austerity measures, which have so far been denied to his office.

● (1050)

This is the context we are working in. On the one hand, the government is saying to first nations chiefs and councils that they must be more accountable than almost any other government in the country. On the other hand, it will not produce basic fundamental documents to tell the Canadian public how it is spending its money. It seems to me that this inconsistency needs to be addressed before we move forward with Bill C-27.

I want to quote a law professor. I know many will be interested in this because she is not just a law professor, but former chief Judith Sayers. She is the national aboriginal economic development chair and the assistant professor of business and law at the University of Victoria. Also, she was formerly a chief of her nation. Therefore, she has a very good grasp of the situation that is facing first nations.

In her letter to the standing committee of November 20, 2012, she says:

To ensure First Nations members get copies of financial statements, provisions to do that could be placed into these funding agreements between AANCD and the First Nation.

She is proposing a solution instead of Bill C-27. She is proposing that this clause be inserted into these agreements. She also said:

There could also be a process put in place that if a First Nation did not provide their members with Financial Statements within 120 days of the year end, that the members could go to the auditor's office and receive copies. The First Nation would be required to put this in the letter of engagement with the auditor and compensate the auditor for costs of making copies of the audit. Legislation is not required to do this when agreements have dictated First Nation/AANCD fiscal relationships and this can continue to be the tool that can accomplish this.

She goes on to say that passing the law to make first nations provide their financial statements to their members is "not a step toward self governing Nations nor does it make them accountable, it only makes them compliant". This is a key point because the government continues to claim that there will be a miracle that will occur when first nations are required to post their consolidated financial statements, that all of a sudden economic development will occur and there will be lots of accountability. That is simply not the case.

Ms. Sayers goes on to say that part of the problem with the bill is that it is not just money from the federal government, but from the first nations own source revenues, such as grants from organizations, provincial governments and any other entities.

The Federal Government does not have jurisdiction over moneys received from other sources and cannot compel the First Nation to be providing this information to the public.

She is outlining a legislative authority regarding providing financial statements and legal entities to the public. She says:

It is my submission that the federal government does not have authority to legislate with respect to any corporation, society or other legal body incorporated under provincial laws to provide financial statements to members of the First Nation and more problematically, to the public at large.

Then she quotes section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, which gives authority to the federal government over Indians and lands reserved for Indians.

The proposed Bill C-27 claims authority over an "entity" which means a corporation or a partnership, a Joint Venture of any other unincorporated association or organization. Any "entity" that is incorporated under provincial laws whether it is a Corporations Act or Societies act or Cooperative becomes a legal entity, an entity that cannot be considered an "Indian" over which the federal government has no jurisdiction.

That is an important point because the government is now stepping into territory that many first nations feel they have absolutely no authority over. She continues:

If First Nations are incorporating their businesses using provincial law as most do, the Federal government cannot then override the provisions of the provincial law.

Provincial Laws do not require that financial statements go to anyone other than the Directors and Shareholders of the corporation. In BC shareholders access to financial information is subject to the terms and conditions of what is set out in the

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articles of incorporation of the company. So in the instance where the members are shareholders, or have a trustee that holds the shares for them, the financial statements will be available to the members to see by virtue of provincial law.

It would be my submission that the Federal Government cannot define consolidated financial statements of the First Nation as "those of any entity that it controls that are presented as those of a single economic entity" if those entities are a legally incorporated society/corporation/cooperative, partnership, joint venture under provincial law.

I reiterate the fact that the government is now requiring the chiefs and councils to provide any income from these entities and that these entities would be aggregated in the consolidated financial statement. This associate professor of law is claiming that it is overstepping its jurisdiction.

• (1055)

In her conclusion, Ms. Sayers says:

I respectfully submit to this committee that Bill C-27 is not needed and if it does proceed to law, must be fully overhauled to narrow it to areas where the federal government has jurisdiction. First Nations will be challenging this legislation in court regarding this issue and since AANCD spends more than any other federal department on legal fees, this does not seem like a desirable course of action.

That is an opinion that the legislation is not required and oversteps federal jurisdiction.

I want to make a couple points about the testimony in the committee meeting of Wednesday, October 24, of Mr. Harold Calla, the chair of the First Nations Financial Management Board. He raised a point about audits, which is important. He says:

First of all, an audit is a look at history. It's a reactive statement, and it's not designed to be proactive in informing and supporting future decisions. While an audit is a necessary and important part of the overall financial management system, there are many other elements of a financial management system that should not be lost in this discussion.

All orders of government are accountable. Within the federal system, the need for an increased emphasis on oversight within budgeting and forecasting has been recognized as a best practice with the establishment of a parliamentary budget officer. This is an example of an evolving world and perspective of what practices and standards should become as part of the overall financial management system. Good financial management practices should not be defined solely by political objectives. Good financial management should be driven by the needs of all stakeholders and should inform them.

In the case of first nations, this should include the financial results of the transaction activity it undertakes for the delivery of programs and services that a first nation is mandated to deliver. Although an audit does contain notes, these notes are generally a clarification of financial facts. An audit does not make qualitative observations or recommendations, nor does it give a clear indication of future direction.

Mr. Calla went on to talk about an annual report. As he has pointed out, a consolidated financial statement is a retrospective. It talks about the money that has been spent in a bunch of different categories, but does not talk about the results that have been achieved with that expenditure of money. The government claims that it will open up economic opportunities, but that kind of analysis must be done about where money is spent and what results are achieved in order to get that financial snapshot.

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One of the issues absent in the bill, and has been absent largely in the discussion, is what kinds of resources the federal government is providing to first nations in order to help them with capacity building. We have recently seen cuts to tribal councils and other aboriginal organizations, which are the very organizations that provide some of the capacity building and support. On the one hand, first nations would be required to do something in addition to what they already do. On the other hand, the government has cut the very services and program supports that could help them develop the economic capacity, which everybody knows is a step toward lifting first nations out of poverty.

Mr. Calla further says:

The purpose of measures that support financial reporting or being accountable and transparent should create confidence in all stakeholder groups in the financial... capacity of the entity and give an indication of their fiscal capacity. It is always better when stakeholder groups, in this case our communities, are able to establish the accountability and transparency framework that they wish to establish for their community...

It is best if communities pass their own laws and agree to independent oversight by third parties. This is the concept developed by the First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act, and it is currently being explored by 58 of the approximately 100 first nations that have become scheduled under the act.

Once again, there are first nations that do an exemplary job and there are organizations that support this.

I want to quote Jean Paul from the Membertou First Nation who attended the same meeting. He says:

All the information required by the new act is already being provided by the first nations in Canada to AANDC, as per their existing funding agreements over years and decades. Only last year the issue was pushed to the forefront, and now a bill will require all first nations to comply or...AANDC will release the information, and as a last resort, all funding will be stopped.

Mr. Paul raises the question about whether anybody has examined the implications of taking funding away when many first nations are delivering essential services to their communities, which include water, housing, education and so on. That question also has not been addressed.

● (1100)

In an email from AFOA Canada, which again provides support to the financial officer, it says:

Having said all this, the overriding issue here is that only by stating the words "First Nations" within the proposed Bill C-27 and defining these words as per the Indian Act, the government is signaling out a specific group of Canadians. This is of concern because of the increased financial level of reporting and accountability required which includes the schedule of salaries, honoraria, travel and other remuneration. More is being asked of First Nations than other groups of Canadians. If First Nations are not recognized as governments, why are we even comparing them to other governments? And even if they were recognized as Governments in legislation (which they are not), there is a higher standard required upon First Nations within this Bill.

It is interesting because the parliamentary secretary and others have talked about the fact that this is the same standard that is applied to everybody. I will quote from the conflict of interest code for members of the House of Commons. Although we do have to declare if we have an interest or if we receive remuneration from another organization, under the content of our disclosure, it says "the source and nature, but not the value, of the income, assets and liabilities referred to in the Member's statement filed under section 20".

When it comes to contracts or subcontracts, it describes the subject matter and nature. It says, "The following shall not be set out in the summary: a source of income of less than \$10,000 during the 12 months before the relevant date". Once again we have a situation where first nations will be asked to report in a way that members of the House of Commons are not asked to report.

In an analysis that the Assembly of First Nations did on Bill C-27, it indicated that there were several provincial governments in Canada that did not have the same kind of reporting requirements.

Nova Scotia's summaries of expenses of ministers are located at the Legislative Library for public viewing. The Government of Northwest Territories only publishes travel expenses of ministers and does not require salary disclosure of elected officials or senior public servants. Neither Yukon nor Prince Edward Island disclose salaries of elected officials.

The claim that first nations would have to comply with what every other level of government in Canada does is simply not true.

There have been issues raised around privacy. When the privacy commissioner came to the aboriginal affairs committee on October 31, she raised four key questions that needed to be answered. One was the measure demonstrably necessary to meet a specific need? Two was it likely to be effective in meeting that need? Three was the loss of privacy proportional to the need? Four was there less a privacy invasive way of achieving the same end?

This is a serious matter because we are asking first nations chiefs and councils to report in a way that many other entities are not required to report. Those four fundamental questions around privacy were never effectively dealt with. It was outside the scope for the privacy commissioner to make comments on particular legislation before the aboriginal affairs committee, but those are very serious issues that need to be addressed.

The fact that there has not been an appropriate consultation, that there are some serious questions that the consolidated financial statement, by including entities that are band owned, oversteps the authority of the government, that the privacy issues have not yet been adequately addressed and that the issues around the capacity building are not addressed in helping first nations ensure that they have the capacity to provide this information to their members, none of these issues are addressed adequately. Based on this, the New Democrats will oppose the bill at third reading.

● (1105)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague provided an excellent overview, particularly her reference to the fact that there was an accountability framework that was suggested six years ago. Would she speak a little about that?

Also, would there be unanimous consent to table the excellent letter of former chief Judith Sayers that the member referenced many times during her speech? I think it would be very good reading for all Canadians and particular for the members on the opposite side.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the letter to be tabled in the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I know the member has done a tremendous amount of work on this legislation.

Back to the January 2006 accountability for results position paper that was put forward by the Assembly of First Nations, this paper not only set forward a framework for moving forward around accountability for first nations, but it also talked about the challenges that first nations chiefs and councils faced in the burden of reporting that was already required by the government.

Many nations produce 168 to 200 reports every year. When the Auditor General looked at the overall reporting, there were 60,000 reports produced by first nations on an annual basis. It is shocking how much time and energy has to go into reporting.

The other piece that was really important in this position paper was about accountability and relationship for the first nations chiefs and councils to the first nations members who elected them, which everybody would agree is rightly so. There was also the relationship of the government being accountable to first nations for how it spent its money and for the results that the government achieved in spending its money. That accountability relationship is simply absent.

With regard to Judith Sayers' letter, I am happy to share it with any members who wish it since we were denied the ability to table it in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague, who is doing great work in this area. She really explained in detail the bill currently before the House. I do not necessarily want her to go into even more detail since she already did such a good job, so instead, my question is about the process.

We know that this bill was introduced, that it is now at third reading, and that it is subject to time allocation. We thus have only one day at third reading to debate this bill, which, in my opinion, will have a significant impact on first nations communities.

Can the hon. member comment on the Conservatives' approach, which always involves introducing bills and then imposing time allocations on them—if I am not mistaken this is the 30th time they have done this—so that there is as little debate as possible?

• (1110)

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member for Sherbrooke is absolutely correct. I believe it is the 30th time we have had some form of shutting down debate in the House of Commons.

It is interesting that it is in the context of openness, transparency and accountability. Surely part of our responsibility as members of Parliament, if members want to talk about accountability, is to be accountable to our constituents, the people we represent across the country, to ensure we do not pass legislation that is flawed.

It is our responsibility, as the official opposition, to take that position very seriously. Because it links into consultation, one of the things I heard the parliamentary secretary say was that consultation in the context of first nations' rights constituted talking to

constituents. That flies in the face of any number of Supreme Court decisions that talk about what constitutes consultation.

Consultation is not just talking to constituents. Consultation is not just simply having people appear as witnesses before the aboriginal affairs committee. That is a very narrow look at what constitutes consultation and is simply not a widely recognized mechanism for consultation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to attest to the fact that the member is an undisputed expert on the matter. When she goes through a bill, we know that it has been thoroughly examined.

However, as I am not an expert on this issue, I can only ask the following question: does she not find this reaction a bit embarrassing after 16 reports from the Auditor General's office in response to our report on first nations' living conditions?

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting. The government, as it likes to remind us, has a majority and this is the bill that it has chosen to bring forward to address an issue that it sees as relevant in first nations communities.

What we also know from a number of auditor general reports is that child welfare services are underfunded. In fact, there is a human rights tribunal going on about discrimination against first nations children. We know education is underfunded. We know many first nations have boil water advisories or have no access to clean drinking water. We know the houses are full of mould in many communities. We know the child poverty rates in first nations communities are the highest in the country. Yet what the government chooses to bring forward is a bill about accountability and transparency that does not, again, meet any of the requirements of consultation. Therefore, we have to wonder where the priorities of the government are.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her speech and remind the House that the government moved a 29th time allocation motion, and it concerns this bill. The time allocation motion will again muzzle the House and, consequently, first nations, who have continually asked to be consulted. This consultation has never really taken place. However, the duty to consult is entrenched in our Constitution. It is a constitutional duty, but unfortunately something that the first nations have not been entitled to.

We are talking about a lot of issues, including access to water and access to education, which are basic rights of any people. But we have not had any real action on these issues.

I would like to ask my colleague to speak further about the need to ensure that first nations are consulted at least to some extent if not fully.

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• (1115)

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. When I started my speech, I talked about the government-to-government relationship. Back in January at the Crown-first nations gathering, the Prime Minister indicated there would be a change in that relationship and people quite optimistically thought that perhaps there was going to be an improvement in that relationship, that the government would consult in a meaningful way before it brought forward legislation.

Consultation is a very complex matter, and a number of tests must be in place in order to ensure that the requirements around the duty to consult are met. Consultation does not just mean going out and gathering information and then coming back and going behind closed doors and developing a bill that does not reflect what was heard from first nations across this country. We have seen that in a number of other bills. Matrimonial real property is an excellent example.

Consultation needs to be a closed loop. Resources and information and context need to be provided. We need to make sure first nations have the ability to engage, that there is enough time for them to engage in that process. There are going to be challenges when all of the information is gathered, because we are talking about nation-to-nation and governments. They are not all going to agree with the outcome of it, so then we need to figure out a process about how to take these disparate views and come up with a consensus position. Then when the legislation is being drafted, first nations need to be included. That would constitute a consultation process, and that has not happened with respect to this legislation.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated in the House before, transparency and proactive disclosure are important goals for all governments, including first nations governments, and goals that the Liberal opposition supports. However, the Conservatives have a duty to work with first nations to improve mutual accountability, not just impose made-in-Ottawa legislation.

First nations are willing partners on the issues of governance. However, the government must stop treating them as adversaries; it must stop the paternalism; it must stop the raining down of legislation on first nations without any prior consultation; it must stop treating first nations as though they are children in need of discipline or adult supervision. The government must go back to the original understanding of a government-to-government relationship, as was stated in the Royal Proclamation, which will be 250 years ago next year.

The total lack of consultation on this bill is an insult. The government signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which insists upon free, prior and informed consent. The government now sees that as aspirational in nature and has put in absolutely no mechanisms to implement this declaration across government departments or even within the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. It is very sad that again we stand in the House having to fight back against the kind of paternalistic approaches that do nothing to enhance the capacity of

first nations in the country. Yet again, this is a tremendous example of insulting behaviour.

We are very concerned about the genesis of this legislation and its predecessor, which seems to be linked to the controversial report published by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation detailing salary figures of first nations chiefs. We say “misleading” salary figures of first nations chiefs. Then again, as we came to understand in the amendments, linking salary, expenses and the remuneration for band-owned businesses is actually a purposeful sticker shock that has fed into the stereotypes and is extremely damaging to the reputations of all first nations. It is particularly insulting to the first nations who are moving out and leading in terms of successful business enterprises.

The sensationalist report was shown to have contained inflated numbers and misleading calculations of remuneration for first nations elected officials. It reminds me, as a physician in Ontario, of the time when people were listing the fees taken by physicians, not bringing into account that we had to pay our rent, pay our staff, pay the costs of doing business out of that remuneration. It was misleading, as though it was income going directly to physicians.

The Canadian Bar Association has expressed concern that:

...debates that focus on such matters make an informed discussion about the realities of first nations governments difficult.

It has also stated that:

Rather than focusing on legislation that diverts attention from more pressing challenges facing First Nations governments, we encourage a nation to nation dialogue held in the light of constitutional principles.

The AFN has expressed concern that the federal government seems increasingly focused on designing first nations governance from Ottawa despite the fundamental need for first nations to undertake this work for themselves for it to be legitimate. As the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan articulated, this was beautifully done in the Assembly of First Nations discussion on governance and accountability in January 2006. We share those concerns about Bill C-27.

• (1120)

Unfortunately, the government's decision to cut the National Centre for First Nations Governance and to slash the funding for tribal councils and other institutions, which are focused on building first nations capacity, is further undermining the ability of first nations to develop and implement accountability measures. The NCFNG will now be closing its doors early next year. It is hypocrisy to legislate accountability and transparency while cutting funding to the organizations, like the NCFNG, whose mandate is to support the process of nation rebuilding and self-government. How can the government justify imposing additional reporting duties, while at the same time cutting the resources first nations have to comply with these requirements?

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While Bill C-27 is intended to improve the accountability and transparency of first nations governments to first nations citizens, the government failed to carry out its constitutional duty to consult with first nations on the drafting of this legislation or regarding government amendments during the committee stage. Unfortunately, this lack of consultation has resulted in a number of fundamental problems with this bill. The government must work with, not simply on behalf of, aboriginal peoples, as we promised to do in our original treaty relationship and as expressed to us by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Beyond its legal duties to consult, the government also has a moral duty to ensure that first nations are a part of the process to develop good policy that will work for them. However, with this bill the Conservative government would impose major changes to first nations financial reporting requirements with no significant prior consultation with those who would have to implement these proposed changes. One of the most shocking things we heard during the committee testimony was the fact that when the government went to the Whitecap Dakota First Nation to announce this bill, Chief Darcy Bear and his council were not permitted to see the bill in its final form. Chief Darcy Bear even wrote to his local Conservative MP and minister, expressing his concerns on December 11, 2011, stating:

I do wish to point out that when we were asked to endorse the new Bill we were only provided with the backgrounder on November 22, 2011. We did not receive a copy of the actual draft Bill until it was introduced in Parliament on November 23, 2011, which was after our press conference of that same day. We did not have the opportunity to review and analyze Bill C-27....

The chief went on to say:

I do wish to emphasize that we provided our endorsement of the new Bill C-27 based on our support for the former Bill C-575, for the reasons stated above.

The Whitecap Dakota First Nation went on to raise serious concerns about the scope and application of Bill C-27. How does this kind of bait and switch approach, on an accountability bill of all things, facilitate trust and partnership with first nations?

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

The government has used the same flawed approach to manage the issues of drinking water and matrimonial real property. It does not consult the stakeholders, let alone the opposition, about the details of these bills before introducing them.

The government's approach violates its constitutional duty to consult first nations before making any changes to legislation and policies that affect first nations peoples, institutions and rights.

[*English*]

The government continued this pattern at committee, rejecting all opposition amendments out of hand and refusing to consult broadly on the few government amendments brought forward.

The previous Liberal government worked with first nations to develop a broad-based and comprehensive mutual accountability framework. This framework was included in the Kelowna accord, which Conservatives tore up in 2006. It was creative. It was built on collaboration and it was the way forward in terms of building accountability and transparency.

First nations funding arrangements are currently subject to annual allocations, changing program parameters and reporting obligations as well as unilateral realignment, reductions and adjustments. Any effort to improve accountability and transparency must be mutual and should include a commitment by the federal government to be accountable for its spending on first nations programs.

As I have indicated, Liberals fully support the principle of proactive disclosure of financial information from first nation chiefs and councils to band members. Clearly, cases of first nation citizens being denied access to this information are unacceptable. However, we must look at the appropriate accountability relationship for the disclosure of this information.

First nation governments must be accountable to the members of that first nation, the people who elect them. Reporting requirements should be focused on making sure the members of a first nation have access to the appropriate information to hold their elected leaders accountable. Therefore, the proactive disclosure provisions in the legislation should apply to first nations alone. There are existing models from first nations that already have strong governance models, which can be adopted. For instance, there are examples of bands that already proactively disclose financial statements on password-protected websites. These are the types of creative solutions that result from thorough two-way consultation.

The bill also applies to first nations with financial administration laws made under the First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act and this could lead to conflicting reporting requirements. The reporting of salaries and expenses, which the government admitted would have created confusion, was amended but still requires first nation leaders to include compensation in their personal capacity. This not only creates serious privacy concerns but also the possibility of misleading information being disclosed regarding first nation leaders' compensation.

Again, the government refused to listen to the expert testimony at committee and rejected opposition amendments on these issues out of hand.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-27 does nothing to reduce the current overwhelming reporting burden, especially for small first nations with limited administrative capacity.

[*English*]

The Auditor General has repeatedly called for meaningful action to reduce unnecessary first nation reporting requirements that shift limited capacity from community programs. In her 2002 report, the Auditor General recommended that:

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The federal government should consult with First Nations to review reporting requirements on a regular basis and to determine reporting needs when new programs are set up.

As recently as June 2011, the Auditor General reported government progress toward achieving this needed rationalization as unsatisfactory. The government has failed to make meaningful progress on this issue.

First nations provide a minimum of 168 different financial reports to the four major funding departments: INAC, Health Canada, HRSDC and CMHC. That is three per week. The majority of these communities have less than 500 people. AANDC alone receives over 60,000 reports from first nations annually as a requirement under existing funding agreements.

Legislation that adds additional reporting requirements for first nations must also deal with the overwhelming and often outdated and unnecessary burden of existing reporting requirements. The practical requirements of the legislation have the potential to be unduly burdensome to first nations. For example, many communities are in remote areas, which impacts both their service delivery and operating expenses. Most communities do not have funding to build the infrastructure necessary for Internet access or the resource to create and maintain their own websites. Again, the government rejected opposition amendments to provide for alternative reporting options to band members.

I would also like to point out that paternalistic lectures about accountability are particularly insulting coming from the Conservative government. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is facing a serious investigation by Canada's independent election authority for spending irregularities and the Minister of Intergovernmental is under a cloud regarding questionable election expenses during the last election. Both still have their jobs and so much for accountability.

What about transparency? Bill C-38, a 425-page omnibus bill that amended over 70 different acts was rammed through Parliament last spring with no amendments and minimal debate. This fall, the government introduced yet another massive 443-page omnibus bill, tucking in changes to everything from exempting the Detroit-Windsor bridge from environmental laws, to changing the list of navigable waters, to changing the definition of aboriginal fisheries and rules for aboriginal land ownership. All indications are that the government will ram this mammoth bill through completely unchanged as well.

● (1130)

First nations have little to learn about accountability and transparency from the government when the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who the government enshrined in the 2006 Federal Accountability Act, now has to go to court to get the information he needs in order to do his job of reporting back to Canadians, members of Parliament and senators on what is going on with the government's spending.

The bill is inconsistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Prime Minister's commitment at the Crown-first nations gathering to reset the relationship.

[*Translation*]

It is inconsistent with the new approach to managing relations between the Government of Canada and first nations that was supposed to have resulted from the residential schools apology in 2008.

[*English*]

As I have stated, Liberals support the underlying goal of the legislation, but we are very concerned about how it was brought to the House and how the lack of consultation and collaboration in its development has resulted in a fatally, fundamentally, flawed legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech. I would like to begin by pointing out that I also think it is appalling that Bill C-27 is the object of the 29th time allocation motion.

That being said, I would like to ask my colleague the following question. First of all, first nations governments are among the most transparent and accountable in all of Canada, and they are in favour of continuous improvement with consultation. However, the real problem is that they have suffered decades of paternalism, which has placed first nations chiefs in a position where, under the Indian Act, they are responsible for implementing decisions made by the federal government. Not only is that clearly inappropriate, but it is still a recipe for poor results. I wonder if my colleague could comment on these remarks from a first nations chief.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this excellent question. It is so sad that this government does not understand how important it is to avoid paternalistic approaches. The federal government is the one that needs to be more transparent and accountable. First nations exemplify transparency and accountability. I think this government could learn a few things from first nations and follow their lead, and not the other way around.

● (1135)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very interesting comments. Does she agree that this government is not in a position to be lecturing us on transparency? When I saw that this bill was calling for transparency from the first nations, I was flabbergasted. This bill calls for transparency from the first nations, yet this government is the perfect example of a lack of transparency.

Could the member comment on the Conservatives' double standard?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree.

[*English*]

We here are also flabbergasted.

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[Translation]

It is a bit rich for this government to preach to the first nations, when the Auditor General said many times that the real problem was the lack of transparency and accountability from the department, not the first nations.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague seemed to be alluding to the fact that Chief Bear is somewhat in the dark on the legislation. That is just not the truth. We did extensive consultation, including in the previous incarnation of this legislation by the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar. The two concerns that were raised by Chief Bear about separating out certain types of expenses have been addressed in the bill. When the member talks about some kind of lack of transparency that is just not the truth. Chief Bear is now fully supportive of the legislation.

The member was at committee and she heard from individual members who begged our government to do something because when they ask for remuneration from their band council, there is sometimes threats and intimidation. What does my colleague have to say to members of the community who are begging for this legislation, when she is opposing it? How is she going to help them?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member to view the testimony of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs when he was at committee. He and his officials had to admit that there was no consultation on the bill. Consultation was conducted on the previous bill. Chief Darcy Bear supported the previous bill. This legislation reaches far beyond the scope of the previous private member's bill and has created all of the problems that Chief Darcy Bear put in the letter to that member and the minister.

The minister already has the power to request a first nation to release data to a member of a community that has complained. It is appalling that the minister and his officials have literally no data on those complaints. They said they had around 200 complaints a year but they had no data as to whether all of those complaints came from the same person or whether they were all with respect to the same band. There was absolutely no data to support this kind of legislation coming forward. They had no excuses as to why no consultation took place with respect to the huge difference between the original private member's bill and this government bill.

Government amendments had to fix that difference because of the very clear speaking of Chief Darcy Bear and the first nations who were appalled at the bait and switch of support for the principles of a private member's bill. The government bill exceeds the intent of the original private member's bill and first nations find this totally insulting.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is rather strange to see this bill on transparency from a government that is the complete opposite of transparent.

They have muzzled us almost 30 times now and have prevented us from making speeches and debating bills. Here in the House, we can see that this government bill is strange, since it will not improve the

precarious situation or the autonomy and development of the first nations.

What is this government's real objective in demanding something that it does not do itself? In fact, it is currently in court for having refused to provide information on the finance bill.

[English]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, we have to remember that this is the week after the Parliamentary Budget Officer had to go to court to get the information he requires to do his job.

It is the Information Commissioner who is just appalled, department by department by department, at the lack of transparency. It is the access to information requests that are still in bankers' boxes, without searchable information.

I do not know how many Grand and Toy trucks pull up to the government with boxes of black magic markers for it to be able to erase all of the information that might be remotely interesting to Canadians if they are to hold the government to account.

Of course, there is also the inability of Parliament to hold the government to account, because the government will not even give us the information on crime bills, on the F-35s, or anything that we are expected to vote on here in this House.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on this piece of legislation today.

There are those who argue that it is not necessary to enshrine transparency and accountability in legislation governing first nations' financial transactions. Those people appear to be content to let band officials decide whether they want to make available to members the information about how community funds are spent. They seem willing to leave such decisions to chance. Complaints by some first nation residents about their community leaders certainly seem to verify this observation, at least in certain cases. Nonetheless, I remind the House that we have heard disturbing tales about abuses of power.

For example, the Quebec resident Michael Benedict is a member of the Coalition of Abenaki Citizens for a Just, Transparent and Accountable Abenaki Government. He reported that:

My spouse and I have been harassed, my house vandalized and members of our local accountability organization have been intimidated for speaking out.

He went on to say:

Local elected officials were afraid we would empower Abenaki citizens to take a stand against abuse of power, misappropriation of public money and unavailability of information. C-27 will help improve transparency.

We have heard similar concerns in other parts of the country as well. For instance, Bev Brown of the Squamish First Nation has said:

When grassroots people request financial information from band council they are often threatened with support cuts from the band and are shunned in the community...

Like Michael Benedict, she believes that:

C-27 will help band members because it will allow them to view the material online and anonymously.

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The problem boils down to this: Even though community members may ask for details about the remuneration of their chiefs and councillors, unless their leaders choose to release this information, there is no guarantee they will ever see it.

Now, one should not jump to the conclusion that this is the norm. Certainly, many first nations make every effort to provide this information to their community members. The Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, which is forthcoming with this kind of financial information, is a case in point. There is no question that some band councils display these records on their websites while others provide details in householder mailings or post them in their bands' offices. For that, they should be commended.

However, it appears that this is not the practice followed by all. The fact is that every year the federal government receives complaints from first nation residents that they cannot find out what the salaries of their chiefs and councillors are, or the specific work they do to earn their pay. Nor is there any accountability regarding reimbursement of expenses for activities that sometimes are a complete mystery to community members. In fact, many first nation members do not get to see the community's audited consolidated financial statements at all.

In those cases, everything may in fact be above board and the salaries or other financial compensation being paid to first nation leaders may well be worth every last penny. However, unless the books are open for the community members to judge, there is simply no way to know if that is true.

Testimony at the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, of which I am a member, addressed the legislation earlier this fall and suggested that the examples I have cited are not isolated ones. Research data from the aboriginal governance index presented by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy indicates that 25% of first nations fail to provide financial information regarding salaries and expenses to their band members.

Admittedly, this is not the majority, but I am sure that all parties would agree, or certainly should agree, that one in four is very high. Indeed, even one such incident is one too many in a country that prides itself on being a democracy.

While compensation disclosure is basic information that is freely and easily available in all other jurisdictions in Canada, too many of the country's first nation leaders still refuse to make it available to their members. This is despite the fact that our country's chiefs have acknowledged the need to be more forthcoming.

• (1145)

I would remind my hon. colleagues that the Assembly of First Nations' chiefs passed a resolution at their special chiefs assembly in December of 2010 regarding financial disclosure. They affirmed the need to publicly release information regarding salaries and expenses to their members. They also agreed to make financial information available via the Internet, where applicable.

Just over half of the more than 600 first nations have their own websites. However, to date, very few have actually posted salary and remuneration information on the Internet. This does not suggest that all of the others have anything to hide, but it does confirm that good intentions do not automatically translate into good results. The

current voluntary approach clearly does not always satisfy first nation members' right to know.

The assurance of a transparent, accountable, local government is the minimum that first nations members should expect in a democracy like ours. What first nations residents deserve and want is transparency and tangible information from their elected representatives when it comes to such issues.

Bill C-27 would ensure there are written, legal and binding guarantees that financial information will be freely and regularly released by first nation governments to local residents. The legislation would remove any opportunity to leave financial disclosure open to interpretation. It would put an end to the questionable practices of some leaders who think they do not need to account for their salaries and expenses, or for the way financial decisions are made. First nation governments are the only governments in Canada that do not currently have a legislated requirement to make this basic financial information public. The bill before us is designed to address that gap.

Once passed, the act would require all first nations not under a self-government agreement to publish the salaries and expenses they pay to their chiefs and councillors on an annual basis. This means that they would need to disclose things like wages, commissions, bonuses, fees, honorariums, dividends and any other financial or non-monetary benefits they may receive. The entire remuneration received by chiefs and councillors would be disclosed, not just a portion of their remuneration paid for from funds transferred by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. The proposed act also stipulates that information must be provided about spending related to transportation, accommodations, meals, hospitality and other expenses. I would note, however, that Bill C-27 would focus only on the political leaders of first nation governments. It would not apply to their appointed officials or senior staff.

The proposed legislation goes further than Bill C-575, the private member's bill on which it is based. My hon. colleagues will recall that it died on the order paper when the last election was called. The new bill builds on the basic tenets of that earlier legislation, but goes further. Under Bill C-27, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada would also be required to publish the audited consolidated financial statements, as well as the schedule of remuneration for elected officials, for first nations all across Canada, as soon as the information is available.

It is expected that these records would also be made available in band offices, as well as be posted on their websites. As I know, not every first nation has a website. The community could request that another organization, such as a tribal council, a first nation organization, or even Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada itself, post the information on its behalf.

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•(1150)

In addition, the new act would require that audited consolidated financial statements of first nation governments be prepared annually and disclosed to community members and the general public. The audited consolidated financial statements would include information related to any entities that, according to generally accepted accounting principles, are to be consolidated with the financial statements of the first nation, such as band-owned businesses.

Before anyone suggests that this could hurt those businesses' competitiveness, let me set the record straight. Bill C-27 would not require each individual business owned by the band to publish its detailed financial statements. All that is asked for is the publication of audited consolidated financial statements of the first nation as a whole. This would include entities that, according to accounting rules, are consolidated with the first nation, including band-owned businesses. This is simply standard accounting practice. These same principles and rules already apply to government-owned businesses all across Canada.

It is important to recognize that these statements are highly aggregated. Consequently, they would not be required to reveal any proprietary information that would undermine the competitiveness of a first nation's business or that of its partners. In fact, in response to concerns raised by witnesses appearing before the standing committee, the language of the bill has been amended to ensure it matches this spirit and intent.

I also want to be very clear about something else. We are not trying to create extra paperwork or to add red tape that might deter communities from attracting business development. Bill C-27 has been crafted so that no new reports are required. I repeat, no new reports are required. Do not forget that first nations are already required to produce annual consolidated financial statements audited by independent accredited professional auditors. As well, schedules of remuneration and expenses for the chiefs and councillors are a condition of their funding agreements with the federal government.

All that will change once the bill becomes law is that first nations will be legally obligated to share this information with the members of their bands. As I have already noted, many first nation elected officials already practice transparent and accountable reporting of their actions. Indeed, this is a requirement of self-government agreements, which explains why communities with signed agreements would be exempt from the act. However, those who have yet to demonstrate openness and willingness to be accountable to their communities and members must be held to the same standard and that is what the first nations financial transparency act would ensure.

Any concerns that first nation members have about how their communities' moneys are managed can be addressed if first nation governments meet this new accountability standard. This legislation is a win-win-win, no matter how one looks at it. Most essential is that Bill C-27 would make sure that first nation residents have access to the necessary information to make sound decisions about their leadership and their community's future. This goes to the very heart of a democratic society.

Equally important, it would enhance the confidence of all Canadians in first nation governments. Perhaps most promising is

that his act would ensure potential investors that they can safely enter into joint financial agreements and business undertakings with first nations. This could lead to social and economic improvements in the lives and livelihoods of first nation members. When businesses create those kinds of opportunities, it opens up many new prospects for first nation members. It provides jobs and economic opportunities, which could make a real difference in many of these communities.

•(1155)

As the *Winnipeg Free Press* stated in an editorial about Bill C-27 on November 23:

The transparency law may not spark a revolution, but it will certainly enhance accountability and could lead to demands for more reforms, which are desperately needed to raise the living standards of Canada's first people.

That, at the end of the day, is really what the bill is all about. It would provide the legislative foundation upon which to build strong communities and strong economies to create a better quality of life for people living on reserve. What we are talking about here are those opportunities, the business prospects, the economic growth and the jobs that could be created. First nation members, indeed all Canadians, need Bill C-27. This legislation would ensure that first nation community members can count on law and reason, rather than passion, when it comes to good government. They would have written assurance that they can hold their leaders to account.

Frankly, I cannot fathom why there would be any opposition to this reasoned and reasonable legislation. I, for one, am proud to stand behind this progressive act that would put an end to practices that are all too often denying first nations people the same access to fundamental financial freedom as other Canadians. The first nations financial transparency bill would guarantee that first nation residents would enjoy the same democratic rights as all other Canadians.

As I have already mentioned, many first nations already provide this information to their members. It is the same kind of information that is available to citizens across Canada. Certainly here in the House as members of Parliament and in the other place, our salaries are disclosed through the Parliament of Canada Act and through the Salaries Act. That legislation lays out a transparent formula that calculates our salaries and provides for the publication of those details, both for regular incomes and for special allowances that are added to the salaries of MPs who take on extra responsibilities. It is also subject to conflict of interest and ethics legislation.

The Government of Canada is not, by any means, the only jurisdiction that requires this disclosure. Many provinces across Canada require similar transparency and accountability. There are examples from Newfoundland and Labrador. That province has the Financial Administration Act, which permits the provincial legislature to table public accounts each year. In Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick there are similar laws as well.

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Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta all have legislation governing the duty of municipalities to prepare and publish annual financial statements. Territorial governments also hold themselves to this standard. The Government of the Northwest Territories makes its annual financial statements readily available on its website. The Government of Nunavut, through its Financial Administration Act, requires the government to publicly account for its expenditures for the previous year by laying the public accounts before the legislative assembly.

Precise wording of transparency and accountability legislation obviously varies from province to province, but the fact remains that almost all Canadian taxpayers have a guarantee in law that they can access the basic financial information they require to hold their elected representatives accountable for their decisions and their actions. I think that is only to be accepted in a democracy.

The first nations financial transparency act would guarantee that first nation residents would enjoy the same democratic rights as all other Canadians. Bill C-27 would be good for first nation communities, it would be good for business and it would be good for democracy. For all these reasons, I encourage all parties to give the proposed legislation their full endorsement.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my hon. colleague for his speech and remind the House that the words “transparency”, “accountability” and “democracy” are not part of this government’s vocabulary.

Let us talk about the lack of democracy. This bill is the target of the 29th gag order, the 29th time allocation motion moved in this House in order to cut short the debate. We would have liked to be able to continue the debate on this bill.

First nations have been asking the federal government to work with them in order to come up with better transparency and governance mechanisms. Why does the government continue to ignore this opportunity for co-operation?

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, part of this legislation would be accountability and transparency, which our government has made very high priorities. In fact, members only have to look as far as the first thing our government did upon taking office, which was the Federal Accountability Act, to demonstrate the government’s very strong commitment to ensuring accountability and transparency.

Certainly I find it troubling that colleagues across the way in the opposition parties would somehow feel that first nation members are not deserving, for some reason, of that same accountability and transparency that all other Canadians have in the disclosure of financial information and the remuneration of their leaders. It is very hard for me to understand why opposition members would feel that accountability and transparency is not worthy of their support. It is very unfortunate.

• (1205)

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged to hear my colleague’s speech outline the importance of the legislation. I hear comments continuously from opposition

members stating that our government is not transparent and asking how then we can talk about transparency. What those questions show is a complete misunderstanding of this particular piece of legislation. This legislation would publish the salaries and remuneration of chiefs and councils. We do that here in the House, so to say there is a comparison is absolutely false.

Those members also talk about this being some kind of higher standard. Perhaps my friend could comment on whether this piece of legislation would place standards on first nation governments that would be any different from the standards on the federal government.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for his efforts alongside me and other members of the government on the committee that spent time studying this legislation, and certainly for his contributions to it.

In answer to his question, certainly not. All Canadians deserve the same rights to accountability and transparency. Certainly here, as I said in my comments, as members of Parliament our salaries are disclosed to taxpayers, as well as the formula under which they are calculated. Being able to demonstrate to taxpayers how their money has been spent, where it goes and what the remunerations are of elected officials are all important parts of accountability and transparency.

Of about 600 bands under the subsection of the Indian Act that we are talking about, many of those first nation governments disclose this information. However, it is important that all Canadians, including all members of all first nations, have access to that information, which would provide that basic accountability and transparency that we provide here and that many legislatures and provincial and municipal governments in Canada provide as well.

I believe all Canadians should be treated equally. That is what this bill would do.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): I have just a very quick question, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member mentioned the parity between a member of Parliament or someone in the government and the band executive.

I am assuming that the spirit of his speech was about a band member walking into the band executive and saying, “Show me the books”.

Would the hon. member allow that very same person specifically to walk into his office and say that he wanted to open the books? Would the hon. member open the books of all of his expenses in his office to that person?

Mr. Blake Richards: I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker, and I will reiterate to my colleague how important accountability and transparency has been for our government.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes or no? Yes or no?

Government Orders

Mr. Blake Richards: The salaries of members of Parliament are certainly disclosed and basic information is also provided.

The legislation would expect of first nations the very same information being disclosed that is already—

• (1210)

Mr. Scott Simms: All of it?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Our expenses are published.

Mr. Scott Simms: No, they are not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Could hon. members please pay attention to their colleague who has the floor?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I was being rudely interrupted and I did yield the floor to you to call order, and I appreciate your doing that, but it is unfortunate, when a question is asked, that the answer is not something hon. members are interested in hearing. The reason they are not interested in hearing it is that the answer is quite simple. We are expecting the very same accountability and transparency of first nations governments that is expected of all other governments in Canada.

I fail to understand why my colleagues in the opposition would feel that it is not important for first nations people to have accountability and transparency the same as we do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated my hon. colleague's speech, which seemed to have been hastily prepared in advance. I have a question for him. I particularly appreciated the part about the Canadian government's obligation when it comes to financial reporting in relation to its own Crown corporations.

I would like to know on what grounds he is basing his insistence that first nations communities and Indian bands in Canada have an obligation to disclose to all Canadians information regarding companies that could have interests throughout the country. I would like to know on what grounds he thinks he can justify requiring band councils to disclose potentially sensitive financial information to the entire Canadian population.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my remarks, we are talking about aggregated information. We are talking about audited financial statements. I do not believe there is anything that will harm any proprietary business interests in doing so.

This legislation is seeking to simply provide to first nations members that same accountability, that same transparency that is provided to all other Canadians.

It is very troubling to me and very difficult for me to understand why the opposition would see any reason to oppose that very basic accountability and transparency. That is the hallmark of democracy. It is something that has been very important to our government and certainly something that has been well documented and indicated in our actions as a government. Bringing forward the Federal Accountability Act, as our first act, is a very clear example of that.

It is just very unfortunate that the opposition would feel that first nations members should not have that same accountability and transparency, and the very same basic democracy that is expected for all other Canadians. It is very troubling to me.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Churchill.

I have the distinct honour of speaking against the bill on first nations financial transparency at third reading. This is a privilege for me because it allows me to put things in perspective.

My comments on this bill last week garnered some media attention. National and regional media outlets asked me for interviews. I also listened to some of my colleagues express their views on the subject. I have to wonder whether some of them are mechanical puppets—simply install updates using a USB key. Some of my colleagues expressed themselves in a machine-like, cold, inhuman and dehumanized way with no facial expression, not even a blink.

I carried out an analysis of what people said in the House and in the media. My background as a criminal defence lawyer served me well. I pinpointed a number of flaws that the government clearly finds irksome because it keeps trying to calm people down and smooth things over. When Conservatives talk to the media, those flaws come up right away and then the Conservatives immediately try to paper over them, downplay them and even mislead people.

What I am doing today is attacking. This is a principle that was instilled in me very early on. At the risk of repeating myself, I would like to say that, in 2007, when I joined the legal aid office, I worked on criminal cases. I travelled with the itinerant court. In 2007 alone, I dealt with close to 400 criminal cases and a few psychiatric cases. Since I was working for the defence, I learned very early on to find the flaws in the arguments of my opponents, the north shore crown prosecutors, who are very good. Sept-Îles has a team of six or seven, and they do very good work. This gave me the opportunity to practise over the years.

Since the prosecutor introduced the case and spoke first, I had the opportunity to take notes and analyze both the prosecutor's arguments and the testimony of the witness in order to find any flaws that I could bring up during cross-examination.

Here, there are clearly flaws. As is my habit and as I was taught by my employer at the time, François Wuellart from the legal aid office that is today located in Baie-Comeau—hello Mr. Wuellart—I am going to apply the principles that have been a great help to me to date and echo what has been said.

In the House, members can feel the tension gradually building when the accountability of first nations is discussed. The disorganization of the government's official statements in this regard and the questionable choice of messengers, who mechanically deliver talking points dictated by senior Conservative officials, have allowed me to see certain flaws that are clearly affecting the bill before us.

Government Orders

As I indicated earlier, my first instinct is to identify flaws. And I have identified them. I got a bit ahead of myself when I asked my colleague a question a few minutes ago. The flaw here is in our communities' economic bodies and in corporate vehicles.

The rules that apply to corporations must be the same across the country, if only for reasons of competitiveness. My colleagues should agree since they have repeatedly said that economic growth is key in Canada. They must therefore know that the rules that apply to corporations must be the same across the country. Otherwise, we are leaving ourselves open to major lawsuits, which are quite likely to be successful. That is what I want to talk about today.

I am fairly certain that communities across the country, and especially their lawyers, are taking notes as we speak. I am quite convinced that the talented lawyers working for some of these communities have already discovered this and, consequently, are already preparing their case, in the event that these measures are adopted.

• (1215)

We cannot extrapolate. However, I know very well that legal arguments are taking shape. I am just providing the ammunition.

I do not know if this was first done behind closed doors. However, having talked to some journalists, we know that when the Conservatives went before the media, they tried to assure the journalists that this bill, this legislative initiative, would not have any impact, and that there would not be any disclosure of the financial statements of entities in which a band council may have a stake. The Conservatives assured them that this would not happen and that the enterprises, that are the property of or in which community leaders may have an interest, would not be affected.

If we carefully examine the wording of the bill as introduced, we realize—and I want to emphasize this—that first nations are being held to account not necessarily just to their communities, but to the people of Canada. I will present arguments to prove this. We are talking about the transparency of first nations. But, the truth is that these measures will, in a roundabout way, expose entities within the communities.

Circumstances forced communities to develop their own rules and procedures all by themselves because they were isolated from the rest of the world. Aboriginal nations in Canada were left to their own devices for a very long time. That is why some communities adopted innovative and alternative initiatives to meet the needs of their people, measures tailored to the adversarial nature and subtleties of life on reserves.

That is why the rules for businesses and organizations on reserves differ significantly from the rules applied elsewhere in Canada. These businesses and organizations have their own particular dynamics. That is good for us because it is an example of economic diversity as it should be in Canada.

However, the Conservatives find this frustrating, as did their predecessors, because ultimately, few government agents can make inroads on reserves. There is a lot of resistance to clumsy, heavy-handed government interference. That is why reserves are observed from afar. There is evidence that, over the past year, government agents infiltrated communities to glean bits of information. That

paints a pretty clear picture of the prevailing climate and the impenetrable nature of life on reserves.

I believe I have a properly substantiated opinion about what the government is trying to do with this bill: it wants to give groups in Canada with vested interests a close-up view of the economic dynamics of these communities. That is appalling and reprehensible because it suggests that, for all types of organizations across Canada, the government is bound by this financial information and must be accountable in terms of its crown corporations and others.

Things are not as easy on the ground as some think. Auditors deployed by the government cannot even get this financial information. I have just one minute left, which is a first for me, since I only ever speak for eight minutes.

I would like to focus on the issue that, according to my analysis, is the most problematic from a legal standpoint. I would like to comment briefly on a point that was mentioned before.

During the two years that I spent working as legal counsel for my own band council, Innu Takuaikan Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, I observed repeated attempts by provincial and federal authorities to interfere in the day-to-day life and economic systems of communities. That is truly reprehensible. That is why the government is at risk of being involved in major litigation, which I would support.

• (1220)

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Manicouagan for his eloquent speech. He is always trying to get to the root of the matter.

I must admit that, in his speech, he raised some rather troubling ideas, such as the fact that accountability can go so far that it might affect the dignity of aboriginal communities across the country. We might even wonder if this is yet another attempt to subordinate aboriginal peoples in this country. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I would like to point out that band councils are accountable to their own members and not to the Canadian public as a whole.

Government Orders

There is a biased theory that at the end of the day, our taxes support the band councils. This disregards the autonomous revenues earned by the communities and their economic dynamics. Band councils are not accountable to the entire country. The government is simply trying to please lobby groups, very specific and marginalized groups that clearly have power and influence over the current government. It is trying to please them by saying the financial information will be provided. Since it cannot go into these communities, it will find a roundabout way to get this financial information. That is wrong and the government knows it. Take my word for it: at the end of the day, the government will be exposed.

•(1225)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could comment on the general principle that was raised at committee by the AFN regional chief for British Columbia, Jody Wilson-Raybould.

She talked about the notion of accountability and that “our collective task is to ensure that all systems of government are accountable and are meeting certain standards”. She said that with respect to aboriginal people what it is really about is ensuring “appropriate political, legal and financial accountability as part of nation-building or rebuilding”. However, she went on to say that “The bigger issue...is really not about accountability at all; rather, it's about who should be responsible for determining the rules that apply to our governments and our governing bodies. The simple answer is that our nation should be”.

Would the member care to comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

The concept of self-determination has been put forward, and the Canadian government supposedly supports that. A supposedly historic meeting and event was even held last January regarding the self-determination of peoples. That is what it was about.

This work needs to be done from within the communities themselves. It must be developed based on consensus. It must start from within. It is certainly not going to be achieved through a legislative initiative concocted by apparatchiks from who knows where in the pecking order. The Conservatives decided here in Ottawa, far from any of these communities, to unilaterally impose this legislation. That is not how this should happen. Yes, accountability is needed. Yes, a steady flow of information is not always available. Accountability is needed within the communities. However, it is a matter of identity in the communities, a matter of “Indianness”, and this needs to be addressed first and foremost by the community. A little housecleaning is needed.

Ours is a predominantly oral culture. For 20,000 years, most if not all aboriginal nations in this country were able to apply these principles of emulation. These people spoke to one another directly. This should still happen today.

Accountability needs to happen above all in the community. Initiatives created by the Parliament of Canada are certainly not the answer.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am experiencing a strong sense of déjà vu as I rise in the House to speak to Bill C-27, which I also had an opportunity to speak to at second reading. However, I am rising one more time in the House, following my colleagues, to speak to what is imposed legislation and a failure to consult properly with first nations and to address the root challenges that they, as well as Canadians, would like to see addressed. This is yet another tool of division that the government is using to deflect from its own lack of accountability to the most marginalized group of people in our country. It is using that same tool to divide us and communities. That is a sad assessment of where the government is taking our country.

I will start by speaking as the member for Churchill, as someone who has the honour of representing 33 first nations in northern Manitoba, some of whom face incredible challenges. In fact, all of them face incredible challenges, whether in terms of access to health care, housing, education, infrastructure or employment. The list goes on and on, making for what many of us would say is a third world reality existing in Canada today.

Instead of working in partnership with first nations to be able to put an end to these third world living conditions and real challenges that first nations face in Canada, the government once again has chosen to impose its own top-down approach. Its approach is very much rooted in a colonial way of doing things, that the government knows best, that first nations do not need to be heard, that capacity and human and financial resources do not matter. Rather, all that matters are inflammatory press releases and the politics of division to deflect from what the real issues are. I find that fundamentally unjust and unbecoming of what the Canadian federal government ought to be doing.

Here I would point out that the question of accountability is very pressing for all Canadians, first nations, Métis, Inuit and non-aboriginal Canadians. Certainly, when visiting the first nations I represent, it is evident that people want to make sure that funds are used appropriately and that the right kind of investments are made. However, fundamentally we all know that listening to how first nations would best approach the issue of accountability is the way to go.

Government Orders

I would add that this discussion about accountability is not just happening in a vacuum. We have seen the same federal government dismiss the whole notion of accountability when it comes to itself. We recall the purchases of orange juice for \$16 and the use of the Coast Guard for trips that clearly had no connection to any emergency situation. We know of investigations that have taken place and are taking place around electoral discrepancies involving donations. We have heard of ministers and certainly members of Parliament who fail to come clean when it comes to serious questions that we, the opposition, have with respect to the use of finances. Perhaps the best example is the omnibus budget bills. If the government were so interested in accountability and transparency, why would it not allow us to go through the serious changes it is proposing in these omnibus budget bills? If it really wanted to be a model in terms of accountability for all Canadians, then it would be using that same tough-on-accountability stand with itself.

• (1230)

This is the irony of the situation we face. Once again the Conservative federal government is keen to point at first nations and approach them with a patriarchal, top-down approach that is not suitable for a Canadian federal government after all we have learned over the last few decades. We are basically seeing the clock being rolled back on fair dealing based on a government-to-government relationship with first nations. This of course should be seen in the light of the fact that the Prime Minister himself made what he claimed to be a sincere apology to residential school survivors, that it would be a new day, that there would be a new way of doing things. All we have seen, however, is a breaking of that commitment, a breaking of that promise, and nowhere is that more clearly felt than among first nations themselves.

New Democrats believe that Bill C-27 must be considered in the context of the June 2011 findings of the Auditor General that despite repeated audits recommending numerous reforms over the last decade, the federal government has failed abysmally to address worsening conditions in first nations. In particular the Auditor General noted that the reporting burden on first nations has worsened in recent years. The Auditor General repeatedly recommended reducing the reporting burden, clearly understanding the demands on first nations and knowing that many of the reports are not even accessible.

All of this is to say that if the government only listened to the in-depth report by the Auditor General just over a year ago, we would not be in this situation. However, it is clear that the government takes issue with senior officers that Parliament ought to consult with. We have seen this in other areas. Facts and evidenced-based conclusions are certainly not what the government is interested in.

Raising the ire of aboriginal people is the government's way of dealing with things. Dividing people based on a notion of accountability that it cannot itself follow is the way the government chooses to move forward. That is fundamentally hypocritical.

The NDP does not support this bill. We believe that Bill C-27 does nothing to increase the accountability of first nation governments to their people. It also applies standards that are greater than those for elected officials in many other jurisdictions. I believe this is a very

important point that many Canadians will not know about, thanks to the government's misinformation when it comes to this very bill.

I am sure that the government will criticize me and say that I opposed Bill C-27 and will not actually put out the facts as to why we in the NDP opposed it, because it is not interested in the facts. Instead, the government will riff off the politics of division and disrespect and, frankly, I am ashamed to say, the politics of hate.

When we are talking about the need to understand the double-standard that is being applied here, this notion that elected officials in other jurisdictions would have a lesser standard to live up to than first nation leaders is something worth considering. I would ask that the Conservative members think about that. I would also ask them to think fundamentally about the need to move on, to actually work with first nations to address the serious issues they face, including the desire for accountability, but in an appropriate way, and to address the third world living conditions that aboriginal people face in Canada.

That is when a federal government would actually be providing leadership, and if it is not willing to do it, then the NDP is willing to take its place.

• (1235)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I feel that the member for Churchill has strayed into some very unseemly territory. I do not believe she should have suggested that we have been operating with the politics of hate. As an aboriginal person, I am very happy to debate her on policy issues, but as a member of this government, to suggest that I or any one of us are engaged in the politics of hate against first nations people is astounding. I would like her to clarify this.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage members to read *Hansard* to get at what I actually referred to. The member across knows well, being from the same hometown that I am, about the kinds of ads that were placed by the Conservative Party in my campaign, and the kind of messaging, both overt and covert, that was used to turn people against aboriginal communities and the needs that they have. That kind of messaging is shameful. What we do not need is more division. What we do need is for people to come together, for the government to actually work in partnership with first nations and engage Canadians in the real challenges that they face.

The fact that aboriginal people, because they are aboriginal and live in aboriginal communities, face a standard of living that is far below average Canadians' standard of living is unacceptable. I wish the government would consider that notion and get as passionate about that point and the need to act to address those conditions with first nations people rather than changing the subject.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the idea of consulting with people. We need to recognize that it is more than just consultation. We have to recognize there is very strong first nation leadership today that is very real and has the ability to provide the guidance necessary in order to improve the living conditions on and off reserves.

Government Orders

A good example, in terms of how successful negotiations can be, would have been when Paul Martin, as prime minister, sat down with first nations and others, and through consensus and strong leadership from our first nations was able to come up with the Kelowna accord. I believe what is lacking today is the sense of being able to work with our first nation leaders and others in terms of being able to resolve the problems of today so we can be moving forward. That is what is really important.

Would the member provide comment on the importance of recognizing first nation leadership in dealing with issues such as this?

• (1240)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising a critical point on consultation. We are seeing a complete lack of appropriate consultation on one piece of legislation after the other. That speaks to the Conservative government's lack of desire to properly consult with first nations people, which is really a step backward.

I would like to read into the record the Assembly of First Nations report on this issue:

If the issue were only of transparency then, perhaps, the bill would be fine. But, as we have described, the issue is not so simple. [The precursor] Bill C-575 favours the further transfer of accountability away from First Nations, thereby only further entrenching the Indian Act and strengthening the Department of [Aboriginal] Affairs' role in this regard. This is not a solution, it is a short-sighted reaction to alarmist headlines—in fact, it takes us backwards.

The Assembly of First Nations has indicated, both on Bill C-575 but also in terms of Bill C-27, that this is the way backward. When the Assembly of First Nations says that, we do not need any clearer indication as to what is wrong with the government's practices. I am proud that we in the NDP stand with first nations and with the Assembly of First Nations.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our country's forefathers knew a thing or two about accountability. Do people remember that peace, order and good government thing? They were founding objectives of government institutions in Canada under our Constitution. The Fathers of Confederation followed the lead of our other commonwealth countries in the era that assumed these objectives, including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Ireland.

Since Confederation, the provinces and municipalities of this country have also adopted these values and principles, recognizing the necessity and value of good government. With this legislation, first nations members can now rely on these values as well and be guaranteed these principles. The provinces and territories and, by extension, municipalities, which are governed by them, have all acknowledged the need for transparency and accountability, the foundation of good government. That is why Canada's first nations people need Bill C-27.

As my hon. colleagues will undoubtedly agree, accountability requires transparency, something currently lacking in some first nation communities today. Some actually refuse to divulge information that most Canadians would commonly expect, which denies their members access to essential information about the community's affairs. It leaves them wondering just how much their chiefs and councillors are being paid and why their leaders desire to

keep this information out of the public view. First nations members have the right to expect a higher standard. Indeed, they deserve the same measure of accountability and transparency enjoyed by other Canadians, who are assured of access to information about their government's activities because it is enshrined in legislation.

As the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development noted in his remarks in the chamber, our government has made sure that Canadians have ready access to information they need to judge our actions as parliamentarians. The very first piece of legislation we brought to the House back in 2006 was the Federal Accountability Act, which increased public oversight into how Canadians' tax dollars are spent. We not only publish public accounts, which document every dollar that is spent at the federal level each year, we also disclose the salaries of members of Parliament, through the Parliament of Canada Act and the Salaries Act.

These two pieces of legislation lay out a transparent formula to calculate salaries. They also provide for the publication of details of both the regular incomes and special allowances added to the salaries of MPs who take on extra responsibilities. Disclosure of other income and expense information is treated under conflict of interest and ethics legislation, as well. Public servants' pay is also on the record. Federal employee rates of pay are posted on the Treasury Board of Canada website, and all senior public servants are required to disclose, on a proactive quarterly basis, all travel and hospitality expenses.

The Government of Canada is not the only jurisdiction that requires the disclosure of audited consolidated financial statements and salaries. My hon. colleagues from Newfoundland and Labrador will attest that their province has a financial administration act that commits the province's legislature to table public accounts each and every year. The province's transparency and accountability act stipulates that ministers must account for government entities for which they are responsible, each year, in an annual report that includes an audited consolidated financial statement, which is then compared to the funds approved by the House of Assembly.

Newfoundland and Labrador's Municipalities Act also requires that local community leaders make their financial statements and audited reports available to the public. Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick have similar laws. Each has a financial administration act obligating the two provinces' respective legislatures to account for public spending in the previous fiscal year, and both have municipalities acts that require the specification of the types of information that must be made available to the public.

Government Orders

• (1245)

Likewise, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta, all have legislation governing the duties of municipalities to prepare and publish annual financial statements. Territorial governments also uphold this high standard. The Government of Northwest Territories makes its annual financial statements readily available on its website. The Government of Nunavut's financial administration act requires the government to publicly account for its expenditures for the previous year by laying the public accounts before the legislative assembly. The precise wording of the transparency and accountability legislation obviously varies from province to province and territory to territory, but almost all Canadian taxpayers have a guarantee in law that they can have access to basic information they require in order to hold their elected representatives accountable for their decisions and actions.

Many governments also disclose the salaries paid to their elected officials, from premiers to legislative backbenchers, to mayors and town councillors. The salaries of the members of many provincial legislatures are set by legislation and made available to the general public. Disclosure of other income and expense information is often treated under the conflict of interest and ethics legislation.

Nova Scotia's act respecting the public disclosure of compensation in the public sector applies to the public sector as well as to not-for-profit organizations receiving over \$500,000 in public funding. These groups are required to post remuneration information on their websites for employees receiving compensation of \$100,000 or more, or if they do not have a website, they have to make the information available on a publicly accessible website.

Similarly, in Manitoba, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Act requires public sector bodies to disclose to the public the amount of compensation it pays annually to each of its officers as well as employees whose salaries are \$50,000 or more. Along with this legislation, The Legislative Assembly Act of Manitoba sets out that remuneration allowances and retirement benefits of members be established by a commission. Furthermore, the legislation requires that members must post expense reports on the legislative assembly website. In addition to various provincial and territorial laws, a number of municipalities have passed bylaws that require the release of information about mayors' and councillors' remuneration, as a best practice. Clearly what is being asked of first nation leaders is nothing more than what is expected in any other jurisdiction across the country.

As Colin Craig, the prairie director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has said:

The bottom line is every politician in the country—federal, provincial, municipal and Aboriginal politicians, should have to disclose their pay to the public.

What we are asking is certainly not onerous. In fact, in some respects the legislation demands less of first nations than Canadians expect in other parts of the country from other levels of government. Bill C-27 would focus only on the disclosure of remuneration of the political leaders of the first nation governments, not those who are appointed officials or senior staff within their organizations.

I remind the House that self-governing first nations, under the terms of the self-government agreement, are already required to

prepare such financial statements and make them available to community members. That is why these self-governing communities are not included in the bill.

Why should residents of other first nation communities expect any less? We need to only look at the history books to know that developing healthier, more sustainable communities depends on good democratic governance. This still holds true today. When we turn on our televisions we see people in countries all over the world living in less desirable political regimes and who are out marching in the streets demanding that they get this very right. However, we do not need to look beyond our borders to see people calling out for more transparency and accountability in government. First nation members, people living right here in Canada, are often the most vocal in calling for these same rights.

• (1250)

Members of the Squamish First Nation in British Columbia, the Peguis First Nation and other first nations in Manitoba have met with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development or have appeared before the standing committee, of which I chair, and have demanded the same things. They have all expressed their concerns about the lack of accountability from the grassroots perspective.

I will quote some of the things that we have been told.

Phyllis Sutherland from the Peguis Accountability Coalition criticized the \$220,000 tax-free annual salary of her band chief. She talked about people who had pressed for more details about this or who had asked for more information about the band accounts, but had been subject to harassment or had been fired from their jobs.

Ms. Sutherland said:

Bill C-27 is important to grassroots people as it will allow band members access chief and council salaries without fear of threats or reprisals. If First Nations want to govern themselves they should be accountable and transparent as all other levels of government who make their salaries accessible for the public

Solange Garson from a first nation in Manitoba is an elected councillor. She echoed these very same sentiments when she said:

I want accountability for all first nations in Canada. Our politicians need to be held accountable too...Bill C-27 is something [getting] a lot of grassroots support. We want transparency like everyone else.

That is clearly not too much to ask in a country that prides itself on peace, order and good government. To deny first nation members this high standard of governance, which all other Canadians expect and enjoy, is absolutely outrageous. Passing this fair and reasonable legislation is the responsible thing to do to ensure transparency, increase accountability and ultimately more effective governance in first nation communities.

In case others have forgotten, I would like to briefly review exactly what the bill would do and explain how it would be a major improvement over the status quo.

First and foremost, the bill would allow first nation members to easily access the information that they require to assess the performance of their government to hold them to account and to make informed choices at election time.

Government Orders

Bill C-27 would continue to create greater accountability for first nations from their respective community members and these financial records would be provided directly to local populations within their community rather than through the minister as is currently the case when band councils choose to withhold such information.

It is worth noting that this information will be easily accessible to the broader Canadian public in the same way that such information is currently provided by other levels of government in Canada.

The publication of financial records on the first nation aboriginal affairs Canadian website could make it easier for analysts and comparisons could be made by a much wider group of people. This would include other levels of government, academics, the media, economists, investors and interested Canadians. Not only would this improvement result in clearer lines of accountability among first nation leaders, it would also create an environment to have stronger, more capable governments that would attract outside investment and partners in community development.

Aside from upholding democratic principles and the good government that most Canadians already enjoy, this greater transparency would increase confidence in first nation governments among other governments and investors. It would position them to build stronger relationships and ultimately create a better environment for development and investment.

Being certain that the government upholds standard accounting procedures and sound business practices is vitally important to potential investors. Transparency builds trust, which is an integral part of building strong relationships. It is precisely because other levels of government are open and transparent that we have the confidence and support of the business community.

• (1255)

We want to replicate this kind of success in first nations all across the country. Once this legislation is in place and it is clear how communities manage their money and account for those expenditures, businesses would be more willing to pursue joint ventures. They will have greater assurance that they can count on first nations to be a trustworthy partner.

There are many compelling reasons to support Bill C-27, as I have just outlined and several of my colleagues have also explained today, but few are more persuasive than the fact that our country is founded on the fundamental commitment to good government, something guaranteed in legislation at all other levels of government across our great country. Once this act becomes law, first nations communities and first nations members will find themselves in esteemed company. This will be a welcome development among many community members who have called for us to act and to act right now.

I urge all parties to give this worthy legislation their wholehearted support. Let us ensure that first nations citizens enjoy the same rights and privileges that all other Canadians do from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member explain to us the thinking, as he understands it, behind clause 11 of the bill, which would provide a general right of

application to “any person” in Canada to seek the disclosure of records from a court? As a matter of standing, or *locus standi* as we might say in legal talk, this would open it up well beyond simply the members of a first nation or a first nations community. It could allow, for example, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation or the National Citizens Coalition to take on the role. I am sure some people on that side of the House might well applaud that, as I have just heard, but I would find it deeply concerning if we had crusading organizations able to use clause 11 in that way.

Could the member give us some insight?

• (1300)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, the absolute imperative in the bill would be that first nations members would have access to this information. What my hon. colleague knows, as anybody in the House does, is that it is not just our constituents who often look at our spending as the national government or as individual members of Parliament, but it is also the media that from time to time play a responsible role in helping bring attention to mismanagement.

I know the hon. member and his colleagues often run outside to the media to disclose pieces of information that they think are important for Canadians to find out about. In the same way that individual members should have access to this information, also should the information be made available to local media, including many first nations outlets such as APTN and other organizations that would draw attention to the spending of individual first nations.

We already have examples of where this information is being disclosed and where this information and process are being lauded by the media and by investors generally. The information needs to be available to demonstrate that there is full accountability and transparency and that these folks undertake the things that most Canadians would expect.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, transparency and accountability are very important principles. There is no question about that. We will find that within the first nations leaderships or aboriginal communities as a whole, that sense and desire for accountability and transparency is there and it is very real. In his comments, the member made reference to some of the hearings of his committee where members reflected on the importance of accountability and transparency from within our aboriginal community.

However, we need to put this thing in the perspective of how this bill is before us today, as opposed to capitalizing on that interest within our first nations to ensure transparency and accountability and working with them and maybe even enabling those leaders to come forward and assist in putting together the legislation. Therefore, it is not Ottawa imposing something, as if we are giving the impression that the aboriginal community is resisting but Ottawa is forcing when that is not necessarily the case.

There are a lot of people within our first nations community who want and desire, but they have a role to play, not just to provide comment on but to enable them to provide direct input in the making of this legislation. Would the member agree?

Government Orders

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. It is grassroots first nations people who are demanding this legislation. They have been bringing their ideas forward. Over the last seven years, I have heard from first nations community members who are desperate for this information. They have asked for some kind of legal framework so they can access this information. The member is absolutely right that it is grassroots first nations from across the country that have demanded this legislation. They are the folks who have advocated for it and are supportive of it for that reason.

The hon. member may have left some confusion. Let me be clear. There are first nations in the country that are operating absolutely wonderfully. They are disclosing all of the information that would be expected. However, there are some communities that lag behind and it is for those members that we have to see the legislation move forward.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from northern Alberta for helping us understand this issue much better. I also applaud him for the work he does as chair of the committee.

One thing has just crossed my mind. Canada plays a significant role around the world in helping other governments fight corruption. A former colleague of ours, John Williams the head of GOPAC, travels the world encouraging governments to fight corruption. When there is more transparency, there is less corruption. Even the perception that they may be something untoward going on, in the light it may show that it may or may not be. When we travel around other countries, we are often asked about certain cases in Canada.

Does my colleague think this legislation will help? Could my colleague provide an example of how we have improved in Canada and how other levels of government have improved transparency?

• (1305)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, Canada has absolutely been noted internationally for being a transparent nation. That is why the expertise of Canadians and former members of Parliament like John is being solicited in other places. Other nations recognize that transparency and accountability are linked and what is also linked to these two imperatives is economic development and prosperity for whole nations.

There are issues within some first nations communities which really reduce the ability for economic development to take root and for communities to prosper. Our committee travelled from coast to coast and met with some of the most prosperous first nations in Canada today. We have some great examples of prosperous communities. When we asked them what the fundamentals were for getting first nations out of poverty and doing incredibly, every community told us that the first thing that was absolutely essential was trust within the community and full transparency about what went on so every community member would be aware of that and second to make that information public so outside investors would flock to the community.

In terms of building prosperous communities, this is the first step. I join with my colleague in saying this is important for all nations, including our first nations.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also want to congratulate the member. He has put in many years working on first nations and aboriginal issues not only as chair of the committee now, but previously in many different roles on that committee and others.

Would the member expand a bit further on some of the testimony that he heard at committee? We have heard many examples. He may have heard some of the testimony of Chief Darcy Bear from the Dakota First Nation and how he viewed these changes as being so important to the economic development of his community. I am sure there are probably many other examples that my colleague could reference from first nations leaders who have called for this.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for my hon. colleague. He has standing as a leader within the communities he comes from. Many first nations young people look to my colleague as an inspiration.

Unlike my colleague from Churchill, who dismissed my first nations colleague some time ago, I will not. I recognize that my colleague plays an important role in this House. He also plays an important role in his constituency, as well as being an inspiration to first nations people across this country, so I commend him for his work to develop more accountability and transparency for first nations.

He is in good company, because people like Chief Darcy Bear talk about the important work in building up a community. He said that transparency and accountability are actually foundational to building a prosperous community.

My colleague and others continue to lead the way and have demonstrated that things can change if there is a commitment to do it, as Chief Darcy Bear indicated, as did chiefs across this country as well as my hon. colleague.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by way of reminder, every four years, like every member country of the United Nations, Canada undergoes a review of its human rights record and we receive comments from our peers. So it is strange to hear the hon. members talk about transparency and international reputation.

Let me continue. The most recent review, called the Universal Periodic Review, took place in 2009. You just have to read it to see that the same comments come up time and time again from various member countries about first nations' living conditions, about the situation of aboriginal women and girls, about access to education and drinking water. It is appalling.

As UN member countries are condemning this very embarrassing situation on the international diplomatic stage, the Government of Canada's response is to require first nations to provide receipts for per diem allowances. We detect some unease from the members opposite from time to time, perhaps even some remorse—and frankly I hope such is the case—in the face of mistakes that are theirs alone, such as their inability to manage the political, economic and humanitarian problems that aboriginal peoples are experiencing.

Government Orders

Such a feeling of remorse would be appropriate after the release of the Auditor General's report in 2011, a report that followed 16 other audit reports that, for the most part, have remained on the shelf gathering dust. That report from the Auditor General pointed out that the basic standard of living of first nations is getting consistently worse. The report described an ongoing deterioration that future generations will pay for.

By basic standard of living, we mean access to healthy food, to housing and to drinking water. We in Canada live in a G8 country. I cannot take this anymore. This is a shame that we can no longer keep to ourselves, let alone forget. The whole world is now aware of this unbelievable situation. The Attawapiskat tragedy, which is now known around the world, is also a tragedy, a liability, a disgrace for all Canadians. This chamber holds 308 people who are responsible for it, for we surely are. We are parliamentarians and it is in our power to ensure that Canada is not considered by the international media—as the hon. member suggested earlier—as a country that puts up with this absolutely obscene poverty.

I really hope some hon. members are uncomfortable, because this is about humanity and responsibility. We are all responsible for the countless mistakes of the last centuries and the last decades. Today, however, government members, including those here with us today, must acknowledge their responsibility for the fact that, in recent years, the living conditions of first nations have not been given the absolute priority they deserve. As Sheila Fraser emphasized, that very neglect is one of the factors that led to Attawapiskat.

Accepting this responsibility does not mean dumping it onto others, and certainly not onto the first nations themselves. Let us not make the victims into the villains.

My thanks to my colleague who is reminding me that I have to tell you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Joliette.

Instead of accepting the recommendations of the UN and the Auditor General, instead of recognizing that this is a serious problem, though one we can solve, government members, by introducing and passing Bill C-27, are choosing to put the blame onto aboriginal communities under the guise of requiring a transparency that their own ministers have difficulty observing, to say the least.

Instead of reading the multitude of reports, produced both in Canada and internationally, on the situation in first nations, the government is grabbing onto some old information fished up by a lobby group—about one administrator's salary in one community—and making it into a bill that it thinks is worthy of being a government program. An incident blown out of proportion by media in search of a scandal—not that there is any shortage of scandals here—becomes a policy of the Government of Canada. As a way to govern a country, that would be funny if the consequences were not so unfortunate.

The requirements in this bill are useless, because they already exist in a useful, adequate form. They are harmful because they impose a heavy burden on communities that few other jurisdictions have to bear.

They leave the bitter taste of colonialism in the mouth, just like the Indian Act. Where is the meaningful consultation and co-operation

with first nations? Why is there none? Of course, it is because the government is doing this for their own good, as it has always done.

When you read this bill, you see paternalism on every line. The minister gets the power to withhold funds from communities, funds that are necessary to improve the standard of living of the people living there. What is more, anyone, from the community or not, has the right to go to Superior Court to ask that a community disclose its financial statements. Communities are also required to publish those financial statements online, though only half of aboriginal homes have an Internet connection.

• (1310)

As for families whose income is below the poverty line, the vast majority of which still live on reserves, 36% of these households have Internet access. We have to wonder who this measure is intended for. Is it really to ensure that the first nations are more transparent and accountable to their members? Or is it to make it easier for researchers at Sun News to find scandals in aboriginal communities?

This bill is a yet another way to divert attention. They are on the hunt for corrupt band leaders—the ultimate caricature—to hide the mistakes of this government and its predecessors.

What is most shocking in all of this is that audit powers already exist without the need for new legislation. The first nations already have a number of obligations to disclose financial information pursuant to the Indian Act—what a great title—and pursuant to a series of related laws and regulations.

The Governor in Council already has the power to allow the first nations to manage their revenues. He can issue regulations to make this permission effective. The Indian Bands Revenue Moneys Regulations already requires a yearly audit of the financial statements and for the Auditor General's report to be posted in conspicuous places.

Once again, the funding agreements that the department signs with each first nation already include all kinds of requirements, including the salaries of elected and unelected officials, their fees and travel expenses. It is all examined by an independent auditor. Most existing funding agreements are conditional on the delivery of this audited data, with the involvement of the department, if necessary. Furthermore, these days, the department's focus is on prevention and ongoing sustainability, instead of departmental intervention.

In her 2011 report, which looks at the 16 previous reports, the Auditor General stated that the reporting requirements on communities have been too burdensome in recent years. In 2002, the Auditor General formally recommended that the federal government—careful, this will be difficult—“consult with first nations”, to review reporting requirements to determine information needs.

Do we truly need this information?

Government Orders

At the time, the federal government required some 200 annual reports from aboriginal communities, a good number of which were thrown in the recycling bin before being looked at. In 2010, the federal government was still requiring tens of thousands of annual reports, and that number continues to increase.

Today, the government is proposing to expand this huge operation of collecting and producing data, contrary to every recommendation made in the past 10 years.

This zeal, this enthusiasm for audits—which we should consider passing on to the riding office of the President of the Treasury Board the next time he organizes an international summit—is not limited to first nations' activities and services. It extends to the entities deemed to be under its control, such as partnerships, enterprises, associations, projects and organizations, which often receive no federal funding and which we have no business auditing or regulating.

This requirement will create serious problems for the competitiveness of these entities, which are not public organizations but will be subject to public audits. If an enterprise is managed by a first nation—even though it does not receive a dime of the first nation's federal funding—the government will force the enterprise to disclose the details of its finances on the Internet, to the delight of its competitors, who will expect nothing less.

By creating this disadvantage for first nation enterprises, the government is creating an economic climate that is not conducive to the creation of jobs and initiatives, or the economic development of aboriginal communities.

Partisanship aside, I would like to invite my colleagues opposite, who have adopted the mantra of economic development and job creation, to reconsider this measure, which ignores the different types of first nations' initiatives.

I respectfully point out that this type of measure jeopardizes jobs in a depressed economic area. I am not saying, especially as the member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, that I can be considered an expert on aboriginal affairs. However, like many of my fellow Canadians, I listen to the media, I read the papers, and I am aware of the inequality that greatly troubles most Canadians.

Our relationship with the first nations is dysfunctional. It needs help. It is as though the government is trying to make us fill out a form to prove that we have health insurance when we are at the emergency department.

• (1315)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to ask my colleague a question about this issue. I do not have many aboriginal communities in my urban riding of Sherbrooke either. However, I can speak from the perspective of a Canadian observing the Conservatives' interaction with communities. I get the impression that their arguments are reinforcing stereotypes about aboriginal communities even though we know that the vast majority of these communities manage their information very responsibly.

Does he think that the Conservatives are reinforcing stereotypes about aboriginal communities?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very good question.

Personally, that is what worries me the most. I think that Canada, as a country, has a fundamental and significant relationship with the first nations, but that the government keeps putting off discussions about this issue. We need to ensure that our relationship with the people who have given us so much is as healthy as possible. This brings to mind words from a song by Chloé Sainte-Marie in which she recites names taken from aboriginal languages, names that Canadians from east to west use every day.

We have a duty to improve the relationship, and I do not believe that this kind of "government to the rescue" bill will accomplish that.

• (1320)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher on his excellent speech.

I am always surprised at the Grand Canyon-like gulf between our point of view and the government's regarding our relationship with aboriginal peoples. It is unbelievable. Members opposite denigrated proud advocates of aboriginal rights on this side of the House who fight every day alongside first nations and chiefs.

I would like my colleague to explain why there is such a great divide between our point of view and that of the Conservative government with respect to this bill, which is incredibly paternalistic and will only make relations among the Canadian government, the Canadian people and aboriginal peoples more bitter.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead for his good question.

It is indeed like a whole other world. It seems that we have a different world view. I see very little benefit in these rules on the financial transparency of first nations. It seems that the members opposite are giving priority to a notion that they appear to be fascinated with and that is authority.

We also felt this with regard to various legal matters. The rehabilitation of criminals is not something that really interests the Conservatives, so more prisons have to be built. They seem to think that taking a hard line will work, when there is so much injustice. In fact, I was just thinking that, in their world, a glass or at least a bottle of orange juice actually does cost \$16.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I truly appreciated the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher's zeal and passion.

I would like him to speak specifically about how this is a double contradiction from the Conservative government. We have seen it with different bills. The government always talks about reducing red tape and reducing unnecessary costs and administrative work. This is a double contradiction because the Conservatives also say that they want to improve the competitiveness of companies.

What does my colleague think about this bill, which goes against improving the competitiveness of first-nations-related companies and requires them to disclose strategic business information?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Saint-Jean for his very relevant question.

Government Orders

It is indeed a contradiction. Everyone here agrees that we must celebrate the success of businesses and initiatives that lead to the creation of jobs and wealth. We cannot help but be concerned about the impact this will have on different budding ideas that communities may have. I am thinking of a vineyard in British Columbia that is doing very well.

I hope that there will not be any impact on the success of this type of business.

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the past few months, I have been working very closely with the Manawan Atikamekw community in my riding to help it resolve a very difficult situation.

Like all reserves, Manawan has serious problems that will not be fixed with the wave of a magic wand. I could talk from now until morning about the needs of the first nations that I have heard from.

However, I wish to use my time wisely, so suffice it to say that what they truly do not need is Bill C-27. First nations do not want it and really do not need it because it is unjust, useless and contradictory. The Conservative government is so obsessed with its ideological agenda and so bound by its narrow-mindedness that I am tempted to believe it does not understand how unjust this bill is.

In January 2012, the Prime Minister said that he wanted to work with first nations during the Crown-first nations gathering. How can he unilaterally impose such a despicable bill mere months after making that statement? Either he is incompetent or he is ignorant.

The dictionary defines “co-operation” as “the act of co-operating, of participating with others in a task”. For the benefit of the hon. members opposite, here is the definition of “other”: “separate in identity or distinct in kind”. Clearly, alas, the Conservatives understand neither of those two words. So, for their information and for the general edification of all, here is the definition of “coercion”: “to force or constrain”, as in the sentence: “Bill C-27 is introduced in a spirit of coercion and with no regard for co-operation”.

Let me be perfectly clear, I am in favour of transparency. But, since this bill claims to be strengthening it for the first nations' benefit, why does the government make it possible for any Canadian to take advantage of it? The bill allows anyone to get up any fine morning and say that, since aboriginal people are bound by legislation, let us ask for an order that allows us to see their salaries. At that point, it is no longer transparency, it is prying.

To understand the government's action, we have to realize that Bill C-27 comes from Bill C-575, which grew out of a spurious story from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. It is fine to listen to civil society lobby groups, but you also have to be honest enough to look at the facts before giving in to oversimplification.

This bill would never have seen the light of day without the endless repetition of the erroneous information that first nations' chiefs make more than the Prime Minister. That malicious rumour, racist in the strength with which it was spread, morphed into a bill with no regard to the facts: the average salary of a chief is \$60,000 and councillors earn around \$30,000. That is nothing to get into a panic about.

I imagine that actual facts about first nations have little importance in the eyes of the Conservatives, just like facts about climate change and the state of this country's democracy. When they are asked questions, all they do is trot out the same meaningless comments, like an old broken record.

If this bill served any purpose whatsoever, we could agree that we need to review how to implement it. But that is not the case. Bill C-27 is completely useless—as useless as the earth is round, as truly as ice melts, unless of course, its real purpose is to harm first nations. That would not be surprising, since that is precisely what the Canadian government has been trying to do since it was created in 1867.

Bill C-27 is calling on first nations to be even more accountable. They are already accountable to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Is there any point to producing reports that no one reads? No.

• (1325)

It is a fact that the documents produced by this legislation will serve no practical purpose. The reason is quite simple: the public service has no interest in the documents that are already produced. First nations are already sufficiently accountable and the government must stop treating them like children.

Among the needs of aboriginal people are things like education, health care, food, housing, social services and clean drinking water. Bill C-27 must be considered in light of the Auditor General's conclusions in June 2011. The AG reminded us that despite the repeated audits recommending many reforms over the past decade, the government has failed miserably to address the worsening living conditions of first nation members. However, I suppose that will not mean much to a government that is currently being taken to court by its Auditor General.

Once again, this would all seem like a pathetic joke if Bill C-27 at least had any consistency. However, this bill is so poorly put together that it is hardly worth mentioning.

Since coming to power, the Conservative government has done its utmost to steer clear of transparency. It no longer answers journalists' questions, no longer provides information to the Auditor General, and it has cut important audit positions. Then, it dares to ask first nations to do more than other Canadians, when they have neither the expertise nor the means to complete so much paperwork.

This bill is so contradictory that it even breaks other laws. Can we truly allow a bill to trample other laws so easily? Or will the Conservatives perhaps tell us that aboriginal peoples do not have the same rights as others?

I know that we are repeating ourselves, but I think what we have to say is worth repeating again and again. Although the stated objective of Bill C-27 is to enhance the transparency of first nations members, its scope is much broader because it requires the financial statements to be put up on first nations' and the AANDC websites, and permits anyone, not just a first nations member, to ask a superior court to disclose financial statements and salaries.

Government Orders

I will say it again: Bill C-27 is unfair, useless and contradictory. But given that we can say the same thing about the government, I do not expect it to change its mind. Therefore, I have this to say to my aboriginal sisters and brothers: the NDP will work with you to improve your self-governance and to help solve problems that are really affecting you.

• (1330)

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I come from the riding next to my colleague's. Clearly, all across Canada, there are people who are somewhat racist and a bit redneck who cannot bear to see aboriginal people driving a nice pick-up or living in a real house with running water. But the problem does not stop there. A lot of first nations' businesses work in very competitive environments, like trucking, aviation, mining or the service industry.

They often work in extremely competitive situations. If they are forced to post all the dealings they have with all their clients and partners, it will be hell for them. They will no longer be able to compete. But that does not seem to be of the slightest concern to the members opposite because they do not want to see any development among first nations.

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, my thanks to my colleague. It is true that they are people who want to do business. They want to work with us and with all Canadians. Clearly, if their bookkeeping is on a website, it will hurt them a lot. We have no right to allow that. Are other companies going to open their books on a website? I doubt it, because they know that the competition will devour them.

The hon. member mentioned something else and it is extremely important. Yes, they have big trucks, but you drive between Saint-Michel-des-Saints and the Manawan reserve one day. It is 85 km on a logging road. Then let us talk some more about the prejudice they suffer because they have big trucks.

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to get up and ask a question of this member.

From my perspective, I view accountability as rather important to being able to deliver good government. It goes hand in hand. Obviously I support this bill.

Clearly there is a philosophical difference between me and our members and this member and some of the past speeches we have heard from her party. My question will focus just on one particular word she used. She suggested that our measures that we are attempting to pass are akin to voyeurism.

I would like the member to clarify that point. Is the member suggesting we are passing these important measures as some sort of entertainment for ourselves, to pester first nations people? I feel that is rather an undue statement, in my opinion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the hon. member for his question.

I mentioned prying. Yes, we support transparency for first nations in terms of the money they receive, which belongs to them to a considerable extent. We are not opposed to their being accountable. But does everyone need to know everything about their business?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to ask a question about the process. We have talked about the content a lot, but can the hon. member explain the government's actions in terms of the exact process being used for this bill?

We know that this is the 30th time that a time allocation motion is being imposed, including this bill. It was also done when a number of other bills were being introduced. We know that a number of other bills have been subject to time allocation motions. That means debate is being limited.

Can the hon. member comment on this procedure which, in my opinion, is putting democracy in jeopardy, something the Conservatives have been doing since they came to power?

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

When members of Parliament—people who were elected by their constituents to be accountable and to speak on their behalf—are getting less and less time to speak and are seeing an increasing number of time allocation motions, this is a threat to democracy.

[*English*]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to speak on Bill C-27, first nations financial transparency act, today.

As the title of the bill implies, the bill proposes to make crystal clear to community members exactly who gets paid for what within their band councils as well as any other benefits that go along with the job. The legislation states that first nation leaders shall be open about the salaries and expenses of the chief and councillors of the band council. With that knowledge, first nation residents can determine whether they are getting good value from their elected officials.

The bill might just as easily have been called “the citizens for accountability act” because its overarching objective is to increase accountability and ensure that political leaders are answerable to their constituents for their decisions about financial remuneration.

If we look at the root of the word “accountability”, we have the word “account”. The definition of accountability is the obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them and disclose the results in a transparent manner. It also includes the responsibility for money and other entrusted property. The legislation comes down to accounting in its classic sense.

First nation leaders are quite literally being asked to open their books so local residents can see how public money is being spent. To be precise, Bill C-27 would require that audited consolidated financial statements of first nation governments be prepared annually. It is worth noting that this includes all sources of funding.

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In addition to federal government transfer payments from various departments and agencies, first nations have other sources of revenue. The nature and extent of these sources varies from first nation to first nation. It can include funding from provincial and territorial governments, user fees for services such as garbage pick-up, moorage, rental income for housing and property taxes, as well as other profits from economic development.

I would like to point out to my hon. colleagues that producing annual consolidated financial statements is something that band councils already do. It is a condition of their funding agreements with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

These agreements not only have requirements for reporting to the government and for members of first nations, but band councils also need to indicate whether funds were used for the purpose intended and whether programs and services were delivered in accordance with the terms and conditions of the funding arrangements. These financial statements, which have to include schedules of remuneration and expenses, must be audited by independent, accredited, professional auditors. Financial reporting is credible when it is based on independent set accounting standards.

What is new with Bill C-27 is that first nation governments would be obliged to disclose these financial statements to community members and the general public. Individuals who want to know what is in those statements would no longer have to ask for permission to see the books and hope that band council members would comply with their requests. First nation residents would be assured that these details would be disclosed publicly in an annual report to the community.

If first nation members have any concerns about the community's money and how the money is being spent, the new accountability standard would assure them of public avenues to have these issues addressed.

Financial reports would include information related to any and all band holdings, which according to generally acceptable accounting principles, need to be consolidated with the first nations' financial statements, but at the highest level of aggregate.

● (1340)

This would include most businesses owned by the band. I want to be clear that we do not expect each individual business to publish detailed financial statements. The only thing being asked for in this act is the publication of audited consolidated financial statements of the first nation as a whole. This would include any entities that, according to accounting rules, are consolidated with the first nation, such as band-owned businesses.

Since these statements are highly aggregated, no proprietary information would be revealed that could undercut the competitiveness of a business or that of its partners. I want to repeat that, because it is really important for the opposition to hear this. Since these statements are highly aggregated, no proprietary information would be revealed that could undercut the competitiveness of a business or that of its partners.

In addition, for the first time, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development would publish the audited consolidated financial statements, including remuneration for all

first nations officials, as soon as the information became available. As other members have pointed out, these new requirements are consistent with standard accounting practices employed by all other levels of government—the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels. Every other government in Canada routinely discloses audited consolidated financial statements and salaries. Once this act has been passed, it would bring politicians on reserves in line with other elected officials across the country whose salaries are already available to the public.

I can assure the House that accountability in this bill is not simply about bean-counting. As the Auditor General of Canada has defined it, accountability is a relationship based on obligations to demonstrate, review and take responsibility for performance, both the results achieved in light of agreement expectations and the means used. Making it law for first nations chiefs and councillors to open their books is really about good communication. It enhances trust and support for band councils among first nations members, and it increases the confidence of all Canadians in first nations governments.

No one needs to take it from me. No less of an authority than the World Bank made the same argument in a recent report about accountability through communication. The report states:

As an actor in the public sphere, the state is accountable for its actions in providing service delivery to its citizens. Citizens, in return, provide legitimacy to the state through public opinion. Both the state and citizens have communication processes and tools at their disposal that hold them accountable.... The effective use of structures and processes of communication for accountability can result in better relations between the state and its citizens, improved governance and, in the long run, increased effectiveness of development efforts...

The final point gets to the very heart of the legislation before us today. Bill C-27 is fundamentally about ensuring first nations members' democratic rights can be fully exercised. This expectation is clear in the report of a study group authorized by the Public Sector Accounting Board of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, called "Financial Reporting by First Nations". It points out that accounting practices and the need for financial reporting are based on social, political and economic circumstances and the accountability relationships that arise from these circumstances.

● (1345)

The report leaves no doubt that first nation governments are accountable at three levels. First, they are accountable to first nation members living on and off reserve, who have a right to select their first nation government's leaders. Second, they are accountable to the federal government departments that provide funding to first nations, as well as to provincial and territorial governments that have established legal or economic relationships with first nations, and third, to capital advisers who are investors.

Government Orders

Beyond these three groups, with whom first nations have direct relationships, they are also accountable to residents on first nation lands who are taxpayers, such as people with leases, whether they are first nation members or not. They are accountable to the various organizations that have contractual relationships with first nations requiring financial reporting; current and potential business partners who will want the information for decision-making purposes; developers, who are involved in residential housing, industry and commercial properties and other capital projects; as well as regulators and agencies monitoring first nations.

However, interest in first nation financial matters does not end there. Credit rating organizations and financial analysts, the news media, public interest groups and the general public may also want to access first nation financial reports. That is why Bill C-27 stipulates that band councils' annual financial information needs to be released not only within the immediate community but also to the wider Canadian public because, as the Public Sector Accounting Board of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants emphasizes in its report, government's goal is to provide services and redistribute resources, not to make a profit.

A government's budget portrays public policy, establishes estimates of revenue, expenses, expenditure and financing requirements, and is an important part of the government accountability cycle. Put more simply, consistent practices and procedures help to keep first nation governments transparent and accountable and make the services that governments provide more reliable and effective.

Equally important, opening the books and demonstrating sound accounting practices is good for business. This is made clear in the board's report and reinforced by practical experience at the community level. The certainty and predictability that comes with generally accepted accounting principles are a definite plus when it comes to attracting private sector partners. Being certain that a first nation government upholds standard accounting procedures and employs sound business practices is vitally important to potential investors. By applying the new accountability measures in this legislation, band councils will be able to demonstrate best practices in their financial operations, which is crucial to creating an environment conducive to job creation and economic growth.

Once a band council inspires confidence among prospective investors, it can attract economic development projects, leading to greater self-reliance and a better standard of living for first nation residents, the ultimate goal of the bill. This goal has been reiterated in every throne speech since 2006. It was powerfully reinforced in the 2011 Speech from the Throne, which committed the government to support transparency for first nation communities by requiring chiefs and councillors to publish their salaries and expenses. I am proud to say that with Bill C-27 we are delivering on this commitment.

• (1350)

The first nations financial transparency act joins a suite of laws and policies that we have developed to advance economic development on reserve, the most recent being the first nations elections act. These two pieces of legislation are the fundamental building blocks to effective first nation governance. Stronger election and accountability systems will result in stronger, more

stable governments, which in turn will result in more prosperous communities. Strengthened first nation governments will be in a position to earn the trust of business partners who are willing to make solid business investments. These investments will lead to increased economic development and job creation in first nation communities. Who could possibly argue with that?

Anyone who looks objectively at the facts I have laid out, which are validated by the outside sources I have quoted, can only conclude that Bill C-27 is both necessary and beneficial. The legislation meets the needs of first nation residents. At the same time, it advances the interests of their local leaders, other governments, the private sector and, in the end, all Canadians. As I said at the outset of my speech, as much as the act is about increasing transparency, it is ultimately about ensuring accountability and upholding democracy. That is something all Canadians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, hold dear.

Surely all parties can see the merit in this worthy legislation and will give it their vote of confidence.

• (1355)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member just spoke about transparency. I find that rather odd coming from a government that hides everything and that forced Mr. Page to go before a judge to get the documents he is entitled to. Nevertheless, what is most important here is that the member has acknowledged that the financial statements of aboriginal communities are already being audited. An independent accountant already audits and consolidates these financial statements. They already exist and the generally accepted accounting principles are being fully applied.

Furthermore, in her 2010 report, the Auditor General indicated that aboriginal communities were being inundated with forms to fill out, but that there was no official to check them.

What is the point of asking these communities to provide documents if the government is cutting the budgets of the people who are supposed to check them?

[*English*]

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, the requirement for our first nations to report is there because some first nations are not reporting and some of the people in these communities are asking for that to happen. Bill C-27 will fulfill those requests.

Statements by Members

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated before, there is a serious problem in terms of the government not sitting down and having discussions with the leadership of our first nations. We have before us legislation wherein the ideas or principles of accountability and transparency are good and there are many first nation leaders who would support the need for transparency and accountability, but the real question is why the government once again ignored the need to work with first nation leaders to bring legislation, based on that sense of co-operation, forward in the House of Commons.

Can the member provide to the House, in any fashion, the names of anyone within the first nation leadership whom the government actually consulted prior to the drafting of the legislation? Can he list some of those first nation leaders with whom the government consulted to come up with the legislation or the ideas behind the legislation?

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, certainly we consulted. Between January 1, 2011 and September 25, 2012, the department received approximately 250 formal complaints from people in first nation communities in Canada saying they could not access the information that they wanted about their chiefs and their councillors. Bill C-27 will make this happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for government orders has expired. The hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia will have six minutes remaining in questions and comments when this matter returns before the House.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

MISSISSAUGA SANTA CLAUS PARADE

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday I was pleased to participate in the annual Mississauga Santa Claus Parade held along Queen Street in the historic village of Streetsville.

Since 2002, the Streetsville Business Improvement Association, along with hundreds of local volunteers and sponsors, has hosted this important kick off to the Christmas season.

The parade featured in excess of a hundred entries, including marching bands, floats, community groups and yours truly dressed in an 1812 soldier's uniform and accompanied by Councillor George Carlson. The route was lined by thousands of people all waiting for the arrival of Santa and Mrs. Claus. It was a beautiful day and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

I wish to thank in particular parade manager Lucie Muldoon, as well as Robert Chestnutt, Rachel Przygoski, Marg Nieradka, Sue Pattison, Bev Lobo, Kirstin Lobo and Mike Muldoon.

From the village of Streetsville, merry Christmas everyone.

• (1400)

DIABETES

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a 12-year-old boy in my riding who can play keep-up with a soccer ball for almost two hours straight. That is over 10,000 kicks in a row, alternating feet. He is being scouted and invited to the youth academies of professional clubs in Europe.

Today he came and spoke to the Standing Committee on Health as part of the JDRF Kids for a Cure Lobby Day. Michael has had type 1 diabetes since he was six. His mom, Debbie, tells us how hard it is to live with this, saying "It is a disease that never sleeps. It is a disease that never takes a vacation".

However, Michael is determined not to let his disease interfere with his dreams and goals. One cannot help but admire him. We can do more than that; we can help him and the other 300,000 Canadians living with type 1 diabetes.

Michael's day used to start and end with a needle. Now he has an insulin pump. On the horizon, not far off, is an artificial pancreas. Our job is to get Michael there with investment in health research and technologies. He will take care of the rest.

* * *

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 14, it was an honour to present a number of outstanding Vancouverites with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Among these recipients were two veterans of World War II, who voluntarily enrolled themselves in the Canadian Forces despite being denied Canadian citizenship due to their Chinese ancestry.

Mr. Marshall Chow fought in the Normandy invasion that successfully cleared the French coastline, Belgium and Holland and finally gained Germany. On his part, Mr. Neill Chan volunteered for commando training and served primarily in the South Pacific, including on the infamous Burma Road. Both men returned to Canada as heroes.

In recognition of their service to Canada and steadfast belief in equality for Canadian born Chinese, the government granted citizenship in 1947 to those born with Chinese ancestry. This is one example of how Canadians have touched people, saved lives and impacted the world.

The medal honours Canadians' commitments, contributions and ongoing service and sacrifice as we continue to work together to make Canada the great country it is today.

*Statements by Members***DIABETES**

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand today in support of JDRF's Kids for a Cure Lobby Day. JDRF is the leading global organization and largest charitable supporter focused on type 1 diabetes research.

Currently, more than 300,000 Canadians and their families suffer from this disease and are faced with its devastating complications.

Currently in Ottawa are 40 "Living Proof Champions" and their families, who are meeting with parliamentarians to discuss the personal challenges they face in living with type 1 diabetes and encouraging government to expand the JDRF Canadian Clinical Trial Network to all parts of the country.

One of those champions visiting Ottawa is from my riding, 14-year-old Jordon Mayo, who travelled with his mom, June, from Newfoundland to be part of JDRF's Kids for a Cure Lobby Day.

To recognize Jordon's efforts and leadership, I had the pleasure of visiting Baltimore School in Ferryland this past Friday to present Jordon with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. Indeed, Jordon commits much of his time to JDRF, church, sports and music while maintaining a 99% average at school. To further recognize his efforts, last evening the president of JDRF designated Jordon as a JDRF Diabetes Champion.

JDRF and Jordon Mayo are doing their share to find a cure. Now it is up to us to support these families and this initiative.

* * *

OPERATION RED NOSE

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Burlington branch of St. John Ambulance is once again providing an important service this Christmas season.

Operation Red Nose is a unique program devoted to the prevention of drinking and driving. It is a volunteer driving service offered during the holiday season to all drivers who have been drinking.

The Operation Red Nose service is provided by driving teams, each consisting of three volunteers. Two of the volunteers, a driver and a navigator, ride with the client in the client's vehicle while the other volunteer, the escort driver, follows behind in their own car. In this manner, the client arrives home safely along with their own vehicle.

The service is confidential and free. Donations from clients are gratefully accepted. This weekend, my wife and I, as well our member of the provincial legislature, will be a volunteer team.

I want to encourage everyone in Burlington to use this free service. Please do not drink and drive during this holiday season.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

TIMEEA ENACHE AND MYLÈNE POULIN-BELFLEUR

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate the winners of the

Create Your Canada contest, Timeea Enache and Mylène Poulin-Bellefleur.

Today, I am moving a motion on their behalf to study the feasibility of installing mandatory breathalyzers in motor vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, they would like to thank you for welcoming them and considering this motion. They would like us all to know that drunk driving accidents can happen anywhere at any time to anyone, including us or our loved ones. They want to give future generations a chance and make Canada a leader on this issue. They hope to raise our awareness of this issue and persuade us that, together, we can save lives that would otherwise needlessly be lost.

I would like to encourage all young Quebeckers and Canadians to follow their example and get involved in politics. I would also like to congratulate all of the young people who are working together to build better communities across Canada.

* * *

[English]

RECOGNITION OF SERVICE

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I am honoured to rise today to recognize two citizens for their service.

First is Ellen Irene Montgomery, whose nephew Alvin Johnson is a long-time resident of my riding. Ellen was born in 1925 and at the age of 18 became one of over 21,000 women to enlist in the Canadian Women's Army Corps during the Second World War. Mrs. Montgomery, who passed away earlier this month, served her country until she was discharged in 1946. The courage and determination of women like Mrs. Montgomery helped pave the way for future generations of women to serve in the Canadian military.

Second, I also take this opportunity to recognize the service of Constable Brett Cunningham, a long-time resident of Fort St. John and member of the RCMP and whose parents, John and Carol, are with us today. This week, Constable Cunningham graduates from the training section of the RCMP's historic Musical Ride. I congratulate Constable Cunningham for having done his family and his region proud.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic and social mobility is the key measure of a successful democracy. The Fraser Institute recently showed that Canadians can get ahead and are getting ahead, that where someone is today does not determine where he or she will be in 10 to 15 years. Two of every five Canadians in the bottom group of income earners in 1990 ended up in the top 40% by 2009. However, despite our government's lowering of taxes, the cost of living and the cost of three other levels of government are squeezing Canadian families. Many are spending more than they earn just to pay their bills.

Statements by Members

Meanwhile, the NDP's mentors at the Broadbent Institute have unveiled the biggest threat to Canadians' ability to get ahead. The \$21.5 billion carbon tax would be just a start; they also want new sales taxes and an inheritance tax. That is the potential agenda of the NDP if it were ever to become the government. The socialists want to seize Canadians' lifetime savings after we die. That is something Conservatives would never do.

* * *

WINDERMERE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the fantastic work of students and faculty at Windermere Secondary School in Vancouver Kingsway, as they launch their fourth annual climate change conference. This event is organized entirely by the grade 11 leadership class at Windermere.

As world leaders meet in Doha this week to discuss global environmental issues, students from all over Vancouver will gather to educate themselves about the impacts of climate change and motivate one another to take steps toward creating a better planet. The Windermere climate change conference will culminate in an afternoon of action where students will put what they have learned into action and take concrete steps to address this global challenge.

Canada has been criticized in recent years for lagging behind and acting as an obstacle to solving climate change. However, the youth of Canada recognize the seriousness of this issue and are leading the charge to ensure that future generations are not left to pay the price for our inaction.

I call on parliamentarians to stand with the leaders of tomorrow, young Canadians, and take immediate action to combat climate change and protect our environment. Congratulations to Windermere and Vancouver students.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada and the world are marking 16 days of activism against gender violence. An important area of concern for our government is ensuring the safety of women on post-secondary campuses. That is why we recently announced the results of a cross-country call for proposals for Status of Women Canada funding of innovative projects that respond to the safety needs of young women on these college and university campuses. These projects will build partnerships and collaboration between campus and community stakeholders to ensure that women on campuses are safe and able to focus on their studies.

Our Conservative government is committed to addressing the problem of violence against women and girls. Since 2007, hundreds of projects have been approved through Status of Women Canada to help end violence against women and girls across the country. These students are our future leaders. Our government is ensuring that the safety needs of young women on these college and university campuses are being addressed through programs nationwide.

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

OPERATION RED NOSE

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Saturday, Operation Red Nose will once again begin offering its services throughout Quebec and Canada, including in my riding of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert. As they do every year, thousands of volunteers will give their time in order to keep our streets safer.

At the Saint-Hubert location, over 1,200 volunteers gave over 1,600 rides home during the 2011 campaign. In Saint-Bruno and the Richelieu valley area, over 250 volunteers gave some 850 rides home.

Operation Red Nose has also raised over \$44,000 in donations for swim clubs in the greater Longueuil community, including the Hippocampe swim club in Saint-Hubert.

I wish to congratulate Operation Red Nose and its volunteers on their hard work.

If you have had too much to drink, do not drive. Call Operation Red Nose.

* * *

[*English*]

DIABETES

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the all-party juvenile diabetes caucus, I am proud to rise today on behalf of the over three million Canadians living with diabetes.

National Diabetes Awareness Month is celebrated every November to raise awareness of all forms of diabetes and to gain support for critical research toward preventing, treating and curing all forms of this disease.

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease in which a person's pancreas stops producing insulin, a hormone that enables people to get energy from food. More than 300,000 Canadians are affected by type 1 diabetes.

This morning I was honoured to meet with an eight-year old, Noah Stock, a resident of Barrie, who presented me with a scrapbook he created showcasing his life as a child with type 1 diabetes.

I ask that every member of Parliament join me in welcoming to Ottawa JDRF and the 40 children from across Canada who are raising our awareness of Canadians living with type 1 diabetes.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

SUZANNE RIVARD LE MOYNE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Suzanne Rivard Le Moyné, one of Ottawa's most respected artists, died last month.

The recipient of many awards and prizes, including the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, Ms. Le Moyné exhibited her art in many major cities, such as Montreal and Paris.

In 1972, she founded the Canada Council for the Arts' Art Bank.

[English]

A positive force for change in our country's visual culture, Rivard Le Moyné's determination made the Art Bank the largest collection of contemporary Canadian art, with some 18,000 works in various disciplines by nearly 3,000 artists.

As a passionate and visionary leader, she was articulate, well-informed and always open to new ideas. The memory of Rivard Le Moyné and the impact she had live on.

If my colleagues have not had the opportunity to visit the Art Bank, I suggest they do so. They will be impressed and in turn might want to impress upon their representatives on the Board of Internal Economy the necessity of revisiting the existing restrictions on renting Canadian art from Canadian artists for their offices in the Canadian Parliament.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week some more light was shed on the Liberals' arrogant beliefs and divisive attitudes.

First, the disgraced senior Liberal spokesperson for natural resources made outrageous comments showing the Liberals' anti-Alberta, anti-energy agenda. Furthermore, the member for Ottawa South said that MPs from Alberta did not belong here in Parliament and should "go home".

This anti-energy prejudice is the same the Liberals had when they brought in the disastrous national energy program in the 1980s, a program that damaged the economy and cost Albertans billions of dollars.

Then we heard from the Liberal critic for amateur sport, the member for Papineau, who directly attacked Albertans by saying:

Canada is in bad shape right now because Albertans are controlling our communities....

These divisive comments do not belong here in Parliament. They are anti-Canadian and unbecoming even to the Liberal Party. That is why I am calling on the Liberal leader to fire his critic for amateur sport.

* * *

BRITISH COLUMBIA BYELECTION

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, following the distinguished footsteps of former NDP MP Denise

Savoie, last night the citizens of Victoria elected Murray Rankin as their next member of Parliament.

We are excited to have Murray join us in this House to take on the important work of New Democrats showing Canadians that they have an alternative to a Conservative government plagued by scandals, ethical lapses and mismanagement.

He will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with an NDP caucus to make the right decisions when it comes to public policy. If a waste treatment plant is the right thing to do, we will support it even while others flip-flop on the issue just to score a few cheap political points. The ocean is not a garbage can.

Murray will stand up to the Conservatives and their billions in tax handouts to profitable corporations, even while they cut health care and OAS. He will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with NDP MPs from coast to coast to coast who are working together to build a fairer, greener and more prosperous Canada.

Congratulations to Canada's newest NDP MP, Murray Rankin.

* * *

● (1415)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Albertans and all Canadians have long known that the Liberal Party has a deeply ingrained arrogant anti-Alberta, anti-western Canadian attitude.

The Liberal energy critic reminded us just how deep those feelings were when he told Alberta MPs to go back home because they had the audacity to stand up for their constituents.

The Liberal member for Papineau, the son of Pierre Trudeau, the creator of the national energy program that decimated western Canada, said that Canada was in bad shape because Albertans were running it.

The Liberal leader fired the Liberal energy critic, but the member for Papineau has not been disciplined at all for saying, "Canada is in bad shape right now because Albertans are controlling our community and social democratic agenda. That's not working".

Why do the Liberals think they can get away with such divisiveness? When will the Liberal Party leader put an end to these anti-Alberta attitudes? When will he hold the Liberal member for Papineau responsible for his disparaging, divisive and dangerous comments?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are now bracing for the impact of reckless Conservative cuts such as raising the age of retirement for OAS to 67 and slashing health care funding by \$36 billion. Even the banks are criticizing Conservative choices. Today, the TD Bank is calling on Conservatives to invest in early childhood education. That is a heck of a lot better than corporate tax giveaways.

Now that even the big banks are challenging the priorities of the Conservatives, when will the Prime Minister rethink his short-sighted budget choices?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the policy of this government has been to gradually balance the budget over the medium term, while not raising taxes, as the NDP would like us to do, and while preserving our payments for vital programs like health care, education and pensions for our senior citizens.

With that approach, Canada has record leading job creation among major developed countries and policies that are highly emulated around the world, one of the reasons I think that somebody like Mr. Carney can be recruited to serve in another country. Canada has a lot to be proud of.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 50,000 more people are unemployed today than before the recession. That is the Conservative record. The global economy is shaky and Canadians need reassurance. Now the Governor of the Bank of Canada has abruptly resigned. Two weeks ago, the Minister of Finance—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Vancouver East has the floor.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, he left in quite a hurry. Two weeks ago, the finance minister claimed he had contingency plans to deal with another recession.

Could the Prime Minister table his finance minister's contingency plan, or is the finance minister again making this up as he goes along?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, who has done a tremendous job and we know will do a tremendous job in a country with much greater difficulties than Canada, has told me he will take up that job in July of next year. That sort of stretches the definition of abruptly just a little. We are honoured and we wish him well in his new functions.

The record of this government is that there are 800,000 net new jobs created in the country, more people working now in Canada than before the recession. While there is a way to go, this is better than the vast majority of developed countries at this time.

• (1420)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the record is that the finance minister and the Prime Minister cannot get

Oral Questions

their stories straight on whether the budget will be balanced by 2015. They cannot agree even on whether more service cuts are coming. The finance minister claims he has a plan for another recession, but the Prime Minister cannot tell us what it is.

How can Canadians have any confidence in our economy when the Prime Minister does not seem to have confidence in his own finance minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has been recognized as probably the best in his job in the entire developed world. His record speaks for itself. Besides agreeing on all of the big issues, one of the things we most strongly agree on is that the country does not need the kind of tax increases advocated by the NDP. We do not need to raise taxes on employers at a time when we are trying to create jobs. We do not need to raise sales taxes on consumers. We are opposed to a carbon tax on everything.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister are bickering, but this is really not the time, because Europe is experiencing another recession and the United States is slowly heading toward a fiscal cliff. The IMF says that Canada has one of the lowest rates of growth of the developing countries. Canadians want reassurance. The finance minister told Canadians that he has “contingency plans”.

When is he going to table these plans in the House?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to point out for the member opposite that even today the OECD in its fall outlook continues to expect Canada to be among the fastest growing economies in the G7. In fact, Canada will have the second fastest growth among G7 countries over the next two years, only in comparison behind the United States, which is starting from a much lower base than Canada given our recovery.

We are doing very well in the world. We are not in need of a contingency plan because we are going to continue to grow.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is surprising to learn that there is no contingency plan.

The Conservatives—like the repeat offenders they are—imposed gag orders again and again in order to shove an error-filled bill down parliamentarians' throats. Now, six months later, the minister is coming back and asking us to revise it.

When the Minister of Finance was forced to use his latest budget implementation bill to correct errors in the spring budget bill, was it also at the request of the Prime Minister?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are agreed, as we always intended, to balance the budget in the medium term during the course of the current Parliament.

Having said that, Canada has created over 800,000 new jobs. The IMF and the OECD both project Canada to have among the strongest growth rates in the G7. We have the best banking system in the world. We have the highest credit rating in the world by the three major credit agencies and the lowest overall tax rate. Canada is doing relatively well.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could ask the Prime Minister a question about health care.

As many as three million Canadians have no coverage at all with respect to the cost of pharmaceutical drugs and another three million only have coverage for the catastrophic cost. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research have identified inadequate drug coverage as the next issue that has to be dealt with by the first ministers.

Would the Prime Minister agree that in a health accord that needs to happen in 2014 the question of drug coverage will be front and centre in terms of the position of the Government of Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly, the federal government recognizes the jurisdiction of the provinces over much of the health care system. At the same time, we do continue to transfer money to the provinces for that health care system. In fact, in recent years we have been transferring money for health care to provinces much faster than their own budgets are growing. We will continue to uphold our responsibilities in this area.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the biggest challenges facing the system, as identified in the 2004 health accord, were the matter of pharmaceutical drugs and the fact that approximately 6,000,000 Canadians are not adequately covered by the provinces and the existing legislation.

If the Prime Minister believes in a universal system, as he claims, why not address this issue with the premiers in order to come up with a truly national program?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, on this side of the House, we recognize the jurisdiction of the provinces over much of the health care system. We are transferring a record amount of money to the provinces to help them fulfill their responsibilities. In fact, we have been transferring money for health care to the provinces much faster than their own budgets are growing. We will continue to support the provinces in this way.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 1985, the cost of drugs has grown from about 10% of the total cost of health care to now close to 17%. The simple reality is that this is the

fastest growing area of health care costs. It is being borne increasingly by individuals, not simply by provinces.

Does the Prime Minister not understand that in taking this ideological watertight compartment view of the federation that he is in fact denying Canadians access to health care, something of which we are proud of as Canadians and want to protect and advance as Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was previous Liberal governments that imposed certain health care requirements on the provinces, then turned around and cut the funding and refused to fund those very requirements.

The leader of the Liberal Party suggests that he wants to go down that path. This government is not going down there. We work cooperatively with the provinces and we have honoured our commitments on transfers.

* * *

*[Translation]***FINANCE**

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance should get their stories straight.

The Minister of Finance is saying that there will be a deficit in 2014. The Prime Minister is saying the opposite. The finance minister is promising that there will not be any more cuts. The Prime Minister is saying the opposite.

Who is telling the truth about the government's intentions?

Why are the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister out of step on such fundamental issues?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Of course, the member opposite is incorrect, Mr. Speaker. Our intention has always been to balance the budget in the medium term. If the member opposite and her colleagues care to look at the fall economic update, they will see that the deficit in 2015-16 is within the adjustment for risk in the budget. Therefore, it is quite clear that the budget can be balanced during the current term of Parliament.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative platform promised a surplus of \$2.8 billion in 2014, and yet the finance minister's most recent projection shows there will be a deficit of \$8.6 billion. That is a difference of \$11.4 billion.

The finance minister cannot get rid of this with a wave of a hand. The Prime Minister and the finance minister disagree about the size of the deficit and whether more cuts are coming. Why can they not keep their story straight?

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): This is passing strange coming from the NDP, Mr. Speaker. This is a party that recommends more spending, more taxation, bigger deficits for our country. It is a party that voted against the economic stimulus in budget 2009, voted against creating more jobs for Canadians, voted against more infrastructure, voted against municipal infrastructure for provinces. It voted against all of that, all of which have worked.

Yes, there was a budget deficit. It has been reduced by half, and we are on track to a balanced budget.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the world gathers in Doha to fight climate change, the minister is merely re-announcing a made in the U.S.A. policy that will not come into effect for four years; yet climate change does not wait. The minister's failure to act is tarnishing Canada's reputation, which will also affect foreign investments.

What is the minister's plan for the Doha meeting, to sabotage another climate change agreement?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada actually took the lead in developing some of the tailpipe emissions, which I will have more to say about in a couple of minutes. Our government is balancing the need to lower GHG emissions with job creation and economic growth. Canada will continue working with our international partners in Doha to create a binding new agreement, which will include all major emitters.

Canada is halfway toward its Copenhagen target reductions. We have a plan and we are getting it done.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the world gathers to act, the minister and the government are simply AWOL on one of the most important issues facing us today. The world meets in Doha and they are working together to fight climate change, but Conservatives are re-announcing made in the U.S.A. standards for vehicles that will not even take effect for four years. Yet, of course, his oil and gas buddies are free to emit as much as they want.

Why is the minister refusing to work with the international community on tackling climate change?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I say, again, that we have a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, without a \$21 billion job-killing carbon tax that is favoured by the NDP.

With regard to the new vehicle tailpipe regulations for model years 2017 to 2025, we will actually reduce emissions between the model years 2008 and 2025 by fully 50%, and we will reduce the cost to car operators by the same 50%.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is being reported that the F-35 secretariat is not happy with the statement of requirements. This would seem like progress because the Minister of National Defence had a shot at it and failed, and the Minister of Public Works and Government Services was complicit in that fiasco.

The CF-18s need to be replaced, so how do the Conservatives explain to Canadians that we are now left with an auditor, an economist and three deputy ministers to define Canada's defence needs?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the member agrees the CF-18s do need to be replaced. For that reason, we are happy that the National Fighter Procurement Secretariat is going to ensure transparency and due diligence in our decision to replace the CF-18s.

We have put together a secretariat. The membership is comprised of the senior deputy ministers in charge of military procurement, in addition to two independent members. Importantly, one of them is a former Canadian auditor general, and we appreciate very much his contribution and oversight. As the member knows, the secretariat will be responsible for the seven-point plan, including the options analysis.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is great. We have an auditor, an economist and three deputy ministers, and somewhere in there is a walk-into-a-bar joke. However, we are talking about national security, and there are serious policy implications from this procurement. Is the priority Arctic sovereignty, North American air defence and air interception? Is it first strike capability? Does stealth even work?

Are the Conservatives really suggesting that these decisions be left to an economist, an auditor and three deputy ministers to work out behind closed doors?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member, the House and the public that the secretariat will ensure the proper expertise is brought in to review the statement of requirements and to do a full options analysis.

Hon. Vic Toews: Well done, Rona.

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, it is important that as we move forward to replace the CF-18s that we have full transparency and full due diligence. As the Auditor General requested, the Department of National Defence will table its updated cost estimates for the CF-18s.

I thank the Minister of Public Safety for his support.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four years ago, the National Defence ombudsman indicated in a report that injured reservists were not receiving adequate care or sufficient support. He issued 12 recommendations, of which four have been implemented and two were rejected. That leaves six recommendations on the list.

In order to understand why certain recommendations have not been implemented, the ombudsman needs some information. Why are the Conservatives keeping certain documents from the ombudsman?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I stated last week, 10 of the 12 recommendations made by the ombudsman have been acted upon. In fact, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank reservists for the important role they play in the Canadian Forces.

The delay in the implementation, as the minister mentioned, with respect to the necessary changes to ensure there is equal coverage for reservists, is unacceptable. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that we are acting on this issue and we hope to resolve it very soon.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have more faith in the ombudsman than in the minister when it comes to judging progress on the implementation of the recommendations.

In September, the Minister of National Defence shamefully said that the ombudsman should not be defending Canadian Forces members, but rather should simply act as a mediator. I know from experience just how crucial it is for our military personnel to have adequate support.

The Conservatives have failed miserably when it comes to implementing the ombudsman's recommendations. Why? The answer to that can be found in the documents that the minister wants to keep secret. Why is he hiding them?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 10 out of 12 does not seem like a spectacular failure to me, and as I indicated, we will be acting on the remaining recommendations. I would point out that I have spoken to departmental officials about urgently acting on those recommendations. I have informed Canadians, as well as all members of the Canadian Forces, that reservists will be treated fairly. In the final analysis, that is what we are striving to achieve. We are committed to ensuring that progress is made toward fair and equitable treatment of reservists, acknowledging the enormous contribution that they have made in Afghanistan and throughout their service to the Canadian armed forces.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, acting on recommendations is the same as partially implementing. That is what the ombudsman said.

We have the minister's colourful responses to our questions and we then have the facts. The fact is the minister has not co-operated

with the ombudsman. He tried to warn the ombudsman in September, saying he should not advocate for Canadian Forces members. That is also a fact. Just as with the veterans ombudsman, Conservatives are stonewalling, claiming a whole variety of documents are somehow magically cabinet records, even though they have nothing to do with ministers.

We are talking about ensuring benefits for injured soldiers. Will the minister now relent and let the ombudsman find the truth?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I repeat again for the edification of the member opposite, we are acting on these recommendations. We will fulfill our obligation to reservists. We are going to continue to work with the ombudsman in a fair, open and transparent fashion, as we always have, within the mandate of the ombudsman. That is what we intend to do, within the mandate and within the law.

It is interesting, coming from the member opposite. I know what he is not, and that is an advocate for the Canadian Forces. He is not a person who gets up here every day and supports our efforts to give our men and women in uniform the support they need.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

We all know that the minister has a very shameful bias against refugees. In fact, when it comes to health care cuts, premiers like Brad Wall have recognized just how bad the minister really is.

Doctors have reported that children are suffering because of these cuts. A child with a fever and vomiting is only able to access care at a free clinic, due to the confusion around the minister's cuts. Two children with severe asthma cannot get required medications because of the confusion.

When is the shameful minister going to re-establish—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only confusion seems to be coming from that very excitable member.

As I have pointed out to that member repeatedly, this government is increasing by 20% the number of resettled refugees that we admit. It will be the highest per capita level of resettled refugees in the world. We are increasing by 20% our support for their integration. We are introducing the refugee appeal division, a full fact-based appeal for failed asylum claimants, which the Liberal government refused to introduce.

With respect to the IFH changes, I suspect the member is talking about rejected asylum claimants who are delaying their removal from Canada.

HEALTH

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unbelievably, the Minister of Health has decided to make the current prescription drug addiction crisis worse. Hours after the patent expired, she gave six drug companies the green light to sell cheap truckloads of generic OxyContin. She ignored the advice of health ministers, police, doctors, addiction experts and aboriginal leaders. If—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1440)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for St. Paul's has the floor.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, if the minister refuses to reverse her terrible decision, will she tell these companies that the government will not pay for one pill of this highly addictive drug, by ensuring it will not be on any government formulary?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the prescribing of drugs is provincial jurisdiction, so provincial health ministers—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Again, Mr. Speaker, the prescribing of drugs is provincial jurisdiction, so provincial health ministers and doctors have a major role in limiting abuse. Decisions on whether to approve a drug are made by scientists based on their expert assessment of the science and safety.

The opposition wants us to politically interfere in the scientific safety process. Why does the member think the opposition knows more about science than doctors?

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if a reserve forces member loses a limb in Afghanistan, for example, he or she gets a much less generous scale of compensation than a regular forces member losing exactly the same limb at exactly the same time in exactly the same place. The minister has apparently been urgently promising that he could fix this, for the last four years now. The ombudsman has repeatedly demanded action and been repeatedly stonewalled.

Why does the minister hide behind the cloak of cabinet confidentiality? Does the minister really believe that one soldier's arm is less valuable than another's?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member's righteous indignation would seem a little more sincere if he had fixed it on his watch. However, we know that is not the case.

The reality is that we have every intention of treating reservists the same way we treat regular force members. We will be acting on the recommendations put forward by the ombudsman. We will follow the law and the legislation with respect to our interaction and relationship with the Canadian Forces ombudsman.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for months the Conservatives have been planning to auction off Nexen behind closed doors.

They know that Albertans do not want a Chinese state-owned corporation to own a portion of our oil industry. They tried to downplay it during the Calgary-Centre byelection because they were afraid of losing.

They do not want to introduce new criteria for foreign investment and, as usual, their decision will be 100% political.

Will they admit that they plan to approve the takeover and to hell with the details?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. After coming to power, in 2007, we clarified guidelines for foreign state-owned corporations. In 2009, we established national security provisions.

On the one hand, we have the radical NDP who would block virtually any kind of transaction in this country; on the other hand, we have the Liberals who would blindly approve anything, as we heard last week.

Canadians can count on a responsible government that will study the merits of proposed transactions on a case-by-case basis, and make decisions that are in the best interests of Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Sadly, the good citizens of Calgary may join other communities that have been sold out by the government. These are places such as Sudbury where they sold out Falconbridge and hundreds of jobs were lost, places such as Thompson where they sold out Inco and hundreds of jobs were lost, places such as Hamilton where they sold out Stelco and hundreds of jobs were lost, and places such as Montreal and Shawinigan where they sold out Alcan and hundreds of jobs were lost.

Now it is CNOOC and Nexen. The Conservatives are doing it all again. When will they stop selling out and start standing up for Canadian jobs?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada welcomes foreign investment. It gets our enterprises in the global value chain. There are huge opportunities. If we follow their radical agenda, everything would be lost from the outset. It is not a responsible approach to try to impose a \$21.5 billion carbon tax on the shoulders of Canadians and to have a plan to tax everything. Everything would be lost. The economy would be lost and families would lose.

*Oral Questions***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the provinces were forced to pick up the tab for refugee health care, Premier Brad Wall decided to call a friend, but the minister's final answer was, in his words, "un-Canadian". The minister is shirking his responsibility and refusing to provide health care to the most vulnerable people in Canada.

When will the Conservatives start listening to the premiers, stop downloading federal responsibility and reverse these cuts?

• (1445)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I actually disagree with the member's suggestion that asylum claimants coming from, for example, the United States or the European Union are among the most vulnerable people. They have come here from developed countries, in some cases, because we offer much more generous benefits than they could get in their countries of origin. That is why we have sought to have a more rational policy, which indicates that we will provide the basic package of hospital and physician medical services to asylum claimants, but not levels that are more generous than what a Canadian can typically get.

If provinces want to provide prescription and pharmaceutical coverage, for example, to certain asylum claimants who are not otherwise covered by the IFHP, they are welcome to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, will the minister finally realize that we are talking about human beings?

His answers are inconsistent and misleading. Here are the facts: more and more provinces are criticizing the irresponsible cuts to health care for refugees. Quebec, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan have all spoken out against these cuts.

Cash-strapped provinces will send the bill to Ottawa, because people need health care and the provinces have hearts, unlike the Conservatives.

Since the minister will end up stuck with the bill anyway, why not cancel these irresponsible and cruel cuts?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will continue to provide the same medicare or the same services offered to the vast majority of Canadians.

If, for humanitarian reasons, the provinces want to provide health care to illegal immigrants or to people avoiding deportation, visitors and foreign students, then they have the right to do so. They may, in that case, use transfers from the federal government, which are increasing by 6% a year.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years the Liberals ignored climate change and did absolutely nothing when it came to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We know the NDP want to implement a job-killing carbon tax that would cripple our

economy and raise the price of everything. Our government is working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions without disrupting the economy, and we are getting it done.

Can the minister tell us what new measures he has put in place to make real greenhouse gas reductions?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Oakville for a rational question.

Compared to 2008 models, vehicles rolling off the line in 2025 will produce almost 50% fewer greenhouse gas emissions and consume up to 50% less fuel. This improved fuel efficiency is expected to save Canadians upwards of \$900 per year, per car, while reducing GHGs by 162 megatonnes between 2017 and 2025.

We have a plan. It is working.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people are still very concerned. Canadians who want the Conservatives to take real action on climate change will once again be extremely disappointed.

I am not talking about today's bogus announcement; those measures will not even kick in until 2017, when the Conservatives will no longer even be in power.

A new study shows that Canada is simply not prepared to deal with the effects of melting ice in the Arctic, despite the fact that an Environment Canada report pointed this problem out to the minister in 2007.

Are the Conservatives waiting for a major crisis before they protect the north?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, to correct my colleague, today's announcement of regulations from 2017 to 2025 follow on regulations announced a year and a half ago, two years ago for the model years 2011 to 2016. Our accounting methods for our sector-by-sector approach have been recognized. They are accepted internationally. I will be going to Doha to work with like-minded countries to ensure that we create a new climate change regime including all major emitters.

• (1450)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives want to work with other countries, there are many ways to do that. We know the north is particularly vulnerable to climate change. We see it every day. Canadians in the north and across this country are living, now, with the consequences of the Conservative inaction on climate change. Time and time again the government ignores opportunities to act.

As chair of the Arctic Council, why will the minister not put climate change front and centre on that agenda going forward?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP was proud that it did not read budget 2012 and voted against it. NDP members also did not read budget 2011, where our government committed \$150 million to adaptation to climate change focused primarily in the north, focused on communities, focused on infrastructure such as roads, railroads and airports affected by melting permafrost, and on better meteorological weather services for advance warning of extreme weather.

We have a plan. We are getting it done.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, lobster fishers in eastern Canada and Quebec are concerned about further cuts to Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

In January, DFO will stop distributing tags and logbooks. These tools are critical to discouraging illegal fishing and protecting the lobster industry.

This is the latest in a series of attacks on fishers and their families. It follows on the heels of fleet separation, cuts to the employment insurance system and all kinds of changes to the Fisheries Act.

Why do the Conservatives want to encourage illegal lobster fishing?

[*English*]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear, gear identification tools such as trap tags are still required in fisheries where industry has deemed they are necessary. That includes the lobster fishery. DFO has sent information letters to all affected fish harvesters and has posted information online in relation to the new method for tag supplies. We will continue to improve programs for fish harvesters, and we are committed to protecting our Canadian fisheries.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the kickoff for the new lobster season in southwest Nova Scotia. However, fishermen are concerned about the new regulatory changes that DFO is imposing. The Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters have asked the minister for a year to transition to the new tagging system. They have even reluctantly agreed to pay for it. However, DFO is ignoring them.

The east coast lobster fishery brings in \$1 billion annually. On behalf of lobster fishermen, their families and coastal communities, why will the minister not stop being uncooperative and agree to this one-year transition?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member I have not ignored lobster fishers or the industry. I have met with many of them over the past month. Many organizations, including those industry organizations, have shown interest in the opportunity to provide this service to the fishers. This is something they can do. The proposals will be considered, and the tags program will be in place.

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even though the Prime Minister promised a balanced budget for 2014 in the last election, the Minister of Finance recently said that it would not be balanced until 2016.

Despite the contradiction, the Prime Minister claims that he will keep his election promise.

To make that happen, the Minister of Finance will have to cut \$9 billion more than he already has.

Is the Minister of Finance planning to cut services to Canadians by \$9 billion more?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems to have some difficulty with numbers, which was not unusual in the Liberal Party over the time they were in power. If he looks at the fall economic update, the member will see that the numbers show a deficit within the adjustment for risk in the fiscal year 2015-16 of \$1.8 billion, which, as I say, is within the adjustment for risk within the cushion built into the budget for risk. Therefore, we are on track to balance the budget in this term of Parliament.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance promised to balance the books by 2013. Then it was 2014 and then 2015. In his November 2012 fall update, he is saying 2016 to 2017. Adding to the confusion, the day after that, the Prime Minister promised that the books would be balanced by the next election.

Does the Prime Minister intend to follow his own law and hold the election in 2015 or is his timing for the next election as flexible as his minister's promise to balance the books?

• (1455)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to be able to explain the member opposite's confusion with respect to numbers. The numbers are plain. We are on track to balance the budget during the current session of Parliament.

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[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is as if we are not worthy of getting the truth here.

Visitors to the Canadian Postal Museum got a big surprise this week. The museum had been quietly closed, which prevented thousands of philatelists and other interested visitors from seeing it.

We know that the Conservatives are closing post offices all across the country. But going from there to closing a museum surely should have caused them some slight embarrassment.

Oral Questions

It is strange: sabotaging that museum was not mentioned at all when the minister announced the rebranding of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. It seems that it was “understood”. I see. Are any other museum closures “understood” in his announcements?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know full well that, in budget 2012 that we are debating here in the House of Commons, we have kept every penny of our investments in the museums of Canada.

This is what the executive director of the Canadian Museums Association said: “The federal government is demonstrating strong support towards Canada's museums and art sector...”.

We continue to invest in our country's national and local museums to ensure that the museums continue to do what they are already doing: being the jewels of our culture across the country. We will continue to fund and invest in our museums.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fine words, this is another example of how the Conservatives have abandoned the cultural communities of this country. Many young people learned about the postal service and its importance to the history of our country through this museum. Basic decency would mean at least an official announcement of closure and a recognition of the contributions Canadians have made to this museum. None of that happened.

Canada's history is more than just the War of 1812. Canadians know that. Why does this minister not?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Postal Museum is part of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The Canadian Museum of Civilization just received \$25 million more to become the Canadian Museum of History. We are very proud of that investment and we are proud of this museum.

Contrary to the New Democrats' understanding, when we add \$25 million more to the budget to enlarge the museum's mandate to make it more pan-Canadian in terms of its content, to include the Canadian Postal Museum and much more, we are strengthening the largest museum in Canada to do what it does so well, which is to teach Canadian history to all Canadians, whether New Democrats understand it or not.

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LABOUR

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, something happened yesterday that may be unprecedented in the House. The NDP filibustered to try to stop a private member's bill. At the finance committee, for two hours the New Democrats spoke non-stop to avoid a vote on amendments to my bill on labour organization transparency.

Will the Government of Canada—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I will ask hon. members to hold off on their applause until the hon. member for South Surrey—White

Rock—Cloverdale is finished asking his question. The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, will the Government of Canada please state its position on my bill, the amendments and the NDP's scheme to avoid financial transparency?

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, yes, the NDP's attempt to block this union transparency bill and block workers' rights only strengthens our party's resolve to support that member's bill and its amendments.

The reality is that never before has one party in Parliament been so dominated by a single-interest group. One in three members of that caucus are past union bureaucrats or union bosses. They accepted \$300,000 in illegal union money. No wonder they want to block workers from knowing how their money is spent.

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● (1500)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 2011 was the most severe in terms of natural disasters, according to the global climate risk index just released in Doha. Floods and storms claimed thousands of lives and cost billions of dollars in damages.

With this new-found belief that extreme weather can actually be linked to climate change, will the Minister of the Environment abandon his delay tactic and release a comprehensive climate change plan that meets our 2020 target, instead of just making up the numbers?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this House and Canadians need to remember that for 13 long years the previous Liberal government paid only lip service to climate change and then campaigned—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of the Environment has the floor.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, in comparison to the lip service of the previous Liberal government, we do have a climate change plan, a sector-by-sector plan, which does not involve the carbon tax that they favoured. When I go to Doha next week, we will work to engage other countries to write a new climate change regime.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' narrow-mindedness strikes again. They cut funding for the Forges du Saint-Maurice and shortened the season based on 2011 visitation statistics, so it should come as no surprise that the 2012 statistics were lower. That is typical Conservative funding logic: the more they cut, the fewer people visit; the fewer people visit, the more they cut.

Cut guided tours, and you sound the death knell.

Does Canada's only ironworks interpretation site not deserve to be treated with at least as much respect as the War of 1812, if not more?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the member should know that our government has taken significant action to encourage investment in the tourism industry. Indeed, we have improved the economy and economic outlook all across this country. I do not think tourists want to come to Canada to see a \$21 billion carbon tax, because that would increase the cost and bring tourism down even further.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is home to some of the world's best soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen. The men and women who serve as search and rescue technicians often operate in dangerous and harsh conditions to save the lives of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Our nation is well served by these courageous individuals who put themselves in harm's way to save countless Canadians every year.

Recently, three search and rescue technicians were recognized by the United Kingdom for their bravery. Could the Minister of National Defence please inform this House of their achievements?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his strong support of the forces and the opportunity to highlight the courageous work of Canadian Forces search and rescue technicians.

Yesterday, the heroic efforts of three members of the 424 Transport and Rescue Squadron in Trenton were recognized for their work. Sergeant Janick Gilbert, Master Corporal Max Lahaye-Lemay and Master Corporal Marco Journeyman received the prestigious International Maritime Organization Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea for their efforts last year to save two hunters stranded in icy waters near Igloodik, Nunavut. Tragically, Sergeant Gilbert perished during this rescue. Our thoughts are of him and his family. They will be forever remembered by a grateful nation, and we thank them for their dedicated service to Canada.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, B.C. apple growers reject any notion of a

genetically engineered apple being introduced into their environment.

They are supported by a resolution of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities calling for legislation to ensure that B.C. remains a GE-free province in respect to all tree fruit products.

The introduction of the GE Arctic apple has the potential to destroy markets for both conventional and organic apple growers.

Will the minister support farmers and commit today to rejecting any application to introduce the Arctic apple into the environment?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, any decisions about GM products are subject to a rigorous, science-based assessment process. Those assessments ensure that the environment and human and animal health continue to be protected.

This government is working hard to ensure that Canadian farmers continue to have access to the best technology in the world.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 37 librarians and library technicians from the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé are condemning the closure of the Maurice Lamontagne Institute, the only DFO French-language library. The Conservatives are literally doing away with knowledge.

French-language reference documents that are useful to Quebec researchers will be sent to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The minister says that they will be digitized and accessible. That is impossible. It is false, because copyright will not allow it. It might be easier for the minister to simply burn the books.

Will he reverse the decision to close the only French-language library at Fisheries and Oceans, or will he deprive Quebec scientists of high-quality resources?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is eliminating waste and duplication in government.

Library users are asking for digital information, so it is only logical that Fisheries and Oceans would accommodate that demand by making its collection available in digital format.

The library will continue to deliver services in both English and French.

[Translation]

The Speaker: I would like to draw attention to the presence in the gallery of the winners of the Governor General's Literary Awards.

Points of Order

[English]

The 2012 Governor General's Literary Award recipients here today are: France Daigle, Normand Chaurette, Maude Smith Gagnon, Geneviève Billette, Alain Roy, Aline Apostolska, Élise Gravel, Linda Spalding, Ross King, Julie Bruck, Catherine Banks, Nigel Spencer, Susin Nielsen and Isabelle Arsenaault.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to briefly supplement the initial response of the hon. government House leader to the point of order raised yesterday by the hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition on proceedings of the Standing Committee on Finance on Bill C-45.

To be clear about the October 31 motion of the finance committee, which the four New Democrats on the committee voted for, for the record, the chair of that committee was asked in paragraph (a) to write to his counterparts on 10 other standing committees “inviting those Standing Committees to consider the subject-matter” on certain provisions of Bill C-45. They were invited to take up a subject matter study, on which the NDP House leader himself admitted yesterday, “any committee has the right to initiate a study on the subject matter that applies to their policy area, including on the elements of Bill C-45”.

Nonetheless, it remained up to those 10 other committees as to how they would respond to the finance committee's invitation. As I understand it, to a committee, they agreed to consider the relevant subject matter of this budget implementation bill. Indeed, pages 1004 and 1005 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, state:

The standing committees may themselves initiate, without first obtaining the prior approval of the House, any study they feel it advisable to undertake, insofar as it falls within the mandate provided to them by the Standing Orders.

Circumstances of a wide variety inform the choices of committees for studies, whether they be legal or procedural in nature or have a political impetus behind them or, in this case, an invitation letter from a fellow committee. Meanwhile, in paragraph (b), the other committees were “requested to convey recommendations, including any suggested amendments...in a letter...”.

The other committees were not instructed to make a report to the finance committee, as the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley suggested yesterday. They did, however, each agree to correspond back to the finance committee chair with their views on the subject matter studied. That the other committees have not reported to the House on these studies is not a matter of concern for a point of order in the chamber.

I will continue reading the passage from O'Brien and Bosc at page 1005, which states:

The committees then undertake to define the nature and scope of the study, to determine how much time they will devote to it and whether or not they will report their observations and recommendations to the House.

As the hon. government House leader pointed out yesterday, the finance committee did not cede any of its authority with respect to Bill C-45 and the finance committee retained the authority to vote on all proposed amendments before the bill was ever reported back to the House. There was certainly no undue delegation of authority here.

Finally, he pointed out that this was not a novel practice. It may be of benefit to point out, for example, the case of Bill C-50, the Budget Implementation Act, 2008, in the second session of the 39th Parliament. As part of its study of that bill, the finance committee adopted a motion to ask the citizenship and immigration committee to consider the subject matter of a portion of it. The immigration committee accepted the invitation and later agreed to a letter in reply to the finance committee, even agreeing to append a dissenting opinion to that letter.

In closing, while it may be infrequent for one committee to write to another committee inviting it to undertake a study within its area of competence and to reply with suggestions, it is not out of order.

● (1510)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my friend across the way. In particular, I listened to the section that my friend read out about the instructions, because they were instructions coming from the finance committee to the range of committees that I listed yesterday, environment, justice and human rights and so on. However, in section (c) of that instruction was a particular note of concern that I raised with you yesterday, Mr. Speaker, and my hon. friend across the way did not alleviate any of those concerns. It says:

—any amendments suggested by the other Standing Committees, in the recommendations conveyed pursuant to paragraph (b), shall be deemed to be proposed during the clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-45...

For one committee to instruct another to propose a study on the clause-by-clause section, hear witnesses or not, as the case may have been, is an absolute delegation of authority to another committee and instruction to do so.

If the committees then took up that instruction and reported back amendments, as was instructed by the finance committee, by the very definition, the finance committee overstepped the bounds and instructions that came from the House. The authority of those committees to do that work came from this place. It did not originate with the chair of the finance committee or the Prime Minister's Office, or anywhere else. It came from here.

To then have the finance committee go forth and make these types of instructions to other committees and then to hear in the recommendations conveyed, “pursuant to paragraph (b), shall be deemed to be proposed during the clause-by-clause consideration”, is an absolute delegation of authority. It is handing authority over to another committee.

It points back to our utter dismay and confusion with the government when we proposed an exact recommendation to this massive omnibus bill to divide it into its component parts and allow the committees to hear the witnesses who were specific in their expertise to those sections of the bill, which in our opinion should never have been included in the omnibus in the first place. However, the government chose to do it so we allowed it a path out, a way to allow the committees to do their work that would confer no confusion upon the authorities of the committee and its delegation.

The House can make that instruction. We offered a solution for the House to make that instruction. The government refused it out of hand. It then had the finance committee come up with this mess of a resolution that then instructed committees that they absolutely had to give recommendations as if they existed at the finance committee, which they did not.

I appreciate the government House leader's instruction constantly through my intervention in this debate, but I would ask him that in 15 minutes we have a House leaders meeting in private and we can have the conversation there, rather than on the floor of the House of Commons.

Again, I listened for any remediation of our concern that was raised in section (c) that came from the finance committee from my hon. colleague across the way. I did not hear any. We await your ruling on this matter, Mr. Speaker, because it is an important one, not just in its bearing on this bill, but in how all committees conduct themselves going forward.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, not to repeat my intervention of a few moments ago, but I want to point out and emphasize, as I did in my first intervention, that the four members of the New Democratic Party sitting on the finance committee agreed with the process undertaken by the finance committee, extending an invitation, not an instruction, to the other committees.

As I also pointed out in my intervention, there was clear precedence for the actions taken by the finance committee. The opposition House leader and I agree on one thing, and that is to ask you, Sir, in your capacity as Speaker of the House, to give us your ruling at your first and earliest opportunity.

• (1515)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not always agree with the parliamentary secretary on every procedural issue, but I share with him some level of difficulty in understanding why the NDP voted for the motion on October 31 and then today says that it disagrees with the motion and considers it out of order and beyond the scope. It does not make a lot of sense.

There was one member of the House of Commons finance committee who on October 31 voted against the motion. That was myself. However, the NDP voted with the government on October 31 and is now saying that somehow perhaps it was mistaken. It is certainly able to say that it messed up and ought not to have done that and we could all live with that and move on happily every after. However, it is not consistent for the NDP to say today that it disagrees with the government's motion when in fact it voted for it.

Points of Order

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did want to clarify the answer that I gave yesterday in the House regarding members of the public attending committee meetings, and particularly in the incident relating to the defence committee.

As I said, the government believes committee hearings should be open to the public, and I want to ensure that the information I provide to the House is complete and accurate insofar as the defence committee is concerned.

Now while Senate security, and that is where the meeting was taking place, in East Block, which is under Senate jurisdiction, initially advised the chair that the individual in question should not be admitted, after initial reflection the chair did ultimately advise Senate security that the individual should be admitted. However, by that point, the individual had left.

The chair, I should advise the House, has also subsequently met with the Sergeant-at-Arms to clearly establish that the individual should be permitted to attend, as a member of the public, meetings of the defence committee in the future.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. government House leader for the clarification.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do think it is important, if the government House leader could provide on what grounds a chair would approach someone and indicate that he or she was not welcome to participate or be in the audience of a public committee meeting. What made that determination for the chair to approach that person?

The Speaker: I feel we are getting a little away from normal points of order, but given the circumstances, I will allow the government House leader to respond. Then we will move on.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, again, the purpose of my rising on this was simply to clarify the record as I had provided an answer to the House that was not complete previously, and I did want it to be complete.

However, my understanding of the incident, and I was not there or involved, was that it was actually Senate security who provided the advice to the chair that the member should not be admitted for whatever reason or history. That was the advice that he followed and then later took the decision that perhaps there were ways of managing the issue and that he should be admitted.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order which emanates from question period.

During question period, the Minister of Finance said that the books would be balanced in this Parliament, and he said that was consistent with what was in the fall economic statement.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent to table, for the House, Table 3.3 on page 46 of the November 13 fall economic statement, which clearly shows that the country will still be in deficit the year of the fixed election date as set out by the government's own law.

I am seeking unanimous consent to table this, such that all members of Parliament, including the Minister of Finance, can have the benefit of reading his fall economic statement.

Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table the document?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

[Translation]

ORAL QUESTIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on November 5, 2012 by the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie and the House Leader of the Liberal Party, regarding the nature of an answer given to a written question.

I would like to thank the House Leader of the Liberal Party for having raised the matter, as well the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his comments.

• (1520)

[English]

During question period on November 5, the member for Etobicoke North asked the Minister of Public Safety why the government had not provided a substantive response to her written Question No. 873, a very lengthy and complicated question about disaster risk reduction and recovery. The minister replied that it had cost more than \$1,300 just to determine whether an answer was possible, and suggested that the cost of preparing a comprehensive response would be prohibitive.

In raising this point of order, the House Leader of the Liberal Party objected to the Minister of Public Safety's reference to the cost of preparing a response to the question, claiming that this was contrary to our practices, as described at page 522 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, which states:

—it is not in order to indicate in a response to a written question the total time and cost incurred by the government in the preparation of that response.

[Translation]

However, the Liberal House Leader's main complaint was about the nature of the response provided to the written question itself. Specifically, he expressed concern that the nature of the response—a brief statement about why the question would not be answered—was setting a “dangerous precedent”.

[English]

In response, the government House leader stated that the government's response to Question No. 873 made no references to the cost of its preparation, and that the costing information had been provided by the Minister of Public Safety only in the response to an oral question.

[Translation]

It may be useful at the outset to remind all members of the purpose of oral and written questions to the government. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, at page 491 states, and I quote:

The right to seek information from the ministry of the day and the right to hold that ministry accountable are recognized as two of the fundamental principles of parliamentary government. Members exercise these rights principally by asking questions in the House. The importance of questions within the parliamentary system cannot be overemphasized and the search for or clarification of information through

questioning is a vital aspect of the duties undertaken by individual members. Questions may be asked orally without notice or may be submitted in writing after due notice.

[English]

While members are well aware of our practices as they relate to oral questions, they may be less familiar with those that regulate written questions. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition states at page 519 and 520, in relation to questions:

In general, written questions are lengthy, often containing two or more subsections, and seek detailed or technical information from one or more government departments or agencies....Given that the purpose of a written question is to seek and receive a precise, detailed answer, it is incumbent on a Member submitting a question for the *Notice Paper* “to ensure that it is formulated carefully enough to elicit the precise information sought”.

[Translation]

Practices that regulate answers to written questions are similarly referenced at page 522, and I quote:

The guidelines that apply to the form and content of written questions are also applicable to the answers provided by the government. As such, no argument or opinion is to be given and only the information needed to respond to the question is to be provided in an effort to maintain the process of written questions as an exchange of information rather than an opportunity for debate. As with oral questions, it is acceptable for the government, in responding to a written question, to indicate to the House that it cannot supply an answer. On occasion, the government has supplied supplementary or revised replies to questions already answered. The Speaker, however, has ruled that it is not in order to indicate in a response to a written question the total time and cost incurred by the government in the preparation of that response.

[English]

Let me assure the House that I realize full well that over the years Speakers have recognized that they exercise little oversight in the matter of written questions. As always, however, the Chair remains attentive to these matters and is ready to assist in any way it can in ensuring that written questions continue to serve members as an important channel of genuine information exchange.

So I take this as an opportunity to ask the House to bear in mind the underlying purpose of a written question, namely the seeking of information. In my view, it is incumbent on the member who submits it to formulate it in such a way that it is in fact answerable. As such, it is not unreasonable to expect, particularly where the member submitting a question attaches to it the 45-day time limit, that it would be worded in such a way as to allow the government to provide the information requested within the time allotted. Not surprisingly, a question that fails to do so is more likely to yield an answer that fails to meet the questioner's expectations.

[Translation]

Likewise, the Chair believes that it is not unreasonable for members submitting a written question to expect that the government would make an attempt to provide as much information as possible in response in the time available.

If, perhaps due to a request for a reply within 45 days, all of information being sought cannot be produced in time, it is also always open to the government to return later with a supplementary reply to a question already answered.

•(1525)

[English]

However, on careful examination of written Question No. 873 and the reply it received, it would seem to the Chair that both the member asking the question and the government might yet find a way to achieve a result that would satisfy both parties. Is it possible that a differently worded question, resubmitted, could elicit a substantive reply about the government's disaster management activities and policies? The Chair would like to think so. This would help allay the fears expressed by the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie that answers, such as the one provided to written Question No. 873, could recur and become a standard response. In the meantime, I can assure the member that having looked into the matter, the Chair can report to the House that this is not at present part of a pattern that it can find in responses to written questions.

Meanwhile, in the case at hand, the Chair does not find that the rules that apply to the content of replies to written questions also apply to responses given during oral questions, even if the oral question relates to a written question. Accordingly, the Chair cannot find that the reply by the Minister of Public Safety during oral questions is out of order or has in any way offended our practices as they relate to written questions.

[Translation]

I thank hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FIRST NATIONS FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-27, an act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations, be read the third time and passed.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Western Arctic.

I am keen to speak to this bill one more time. The path of this legislation seems to be predetermined, and any sense of debate or committee work should be viewed with that in mind.

Had Parliament been working in a collaborative manner, I believe we would have significantly changed this legislation. Had the government done its due diligence, we would be discussing an entirely different bill. Instead, by ignoring its duty to consult, we have arrived at a point where the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations is wondering aloud if the government is headed toward a conflict with first nations over the way it is unilaterally ramming through legislation that will impact them. National Grand Chief Atleo is accusing the Prime Minister of pushing through a fragmented legislative agenda that he knows first nations communities will oppose. He said this is eroding trust between natives and the government. I think it is important that we listen.

It is instructive to see that the will to meet and consult, as expressed by first nations leadership, has not been reciprocated.

Government Orders

Instead of pulling up a chair and working with those leaders, the government has instructed Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development bureaucrats to state that they have no mandate to negotiate.

Yet, much is being asked of first nations in terms of resource development on their land. We certainly hope the government is paying attention to the Grand Chief, who wrote the Prime Minister and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development last month stating:

We have been patient and reserved judgment. Neither that patience nor that demonstrated goodwill is infinite.

The government's response has been to fast-track legislation like Bill C-27, which remains largely unnecessary. Instead of addressing a multitude of better known long-standing problems that persist on many first nations, the government is creating an unnecessary reporting mechanism. The bill is overly punitive, duplicates efforts and increases the bureaucratic burden on those first nations that do not already have self-government regimes. It sets the course for costly legal battles and ignores the advice of the Auditor General to reduce the reporting burden placed on first nations. Instead, it adds to that reporting burden.

This bill imposes standards that are greater than those applied to elected politicians in many other jurisdictions, in a way that creates more bureaucracy and does nothing to increase accountability of first nations governments to their own communities. It has been created in a vacuum and reeks of bureaucracy. Initiatives like this that are implemented without consultation are bound to fail. It is guaranteeing the reaction that the government has received from first nations. It is as if the government is itching for a fight.

From the outset, we knew there was a problem because the intention of the bill is to duplicate something that already exists. To think that first nations report nothing about the—

•(1530)

The Deputy Speaker: I have to interrupt. The translation is not working. It seems that there is no channel two.

To advise the House of the situation, the speech by the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing was unable to be translated in total. I am going to invite her to continue now, as I am advised at this point that the technology is functioning properly.

•(1535)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, to continue, we knew from the outset that there was a problem because the bill intended to duplicate something that already existed. To think that first nations report nothing about the funding they receive or the salaries and compensation they provide to their leadership is false and misleading.

Government Orders

In fact, first nations produce year-end reports that include annual audited consolidated financial statements for the public funds provided to them. These reports include salaries, honoraria and travel expenses for all elected, appointed and senior unelected band officials.

First nations are also required to release statements to their membership about compensation earned or accrued by elected, appointed and unelected senior officials and the amounts of moneys paid, earned or accrued by elected and appointed officials, which must be from all sources within the recipient's financial reporting entity, including amounts from economic development and other types of business corporations.

We should not be so quick to dismiss the June 2011 findings of the Auditor General, which noted that despite repeated audits recommending numerous reforms over the last decade, the federal government had failed abysmally to address the worsening conditions of first nations.

The report tells us that money is just not flowing to problems and that it is not because of lack of audits or reporting processes. Indeed, the Auditor General pointed out that the reporting burden on first nations had actually worsened in recent years despite repeated calls to reduce the amount of red tape on these communities. To add insult to injury, the Auditor General tells us how many of the reports are not even used by federal government departments and serve nothing but bureaucratic requirements. They can be seen as white elephants, and with Bill C-27 the government is eagerly seeking to grow that herd.

• (1540)

I stick by my assertion that the government is more concerned with creating more red tape to accompany the core funding cut it has made to organizations important to first nations. Their communities rely on the services of tribal councils, the First Nations Statistical Institute and the National Centre for First Nations Governance to assist with many items related to governance, but those budgets have been slashed.

In fact, at the same time the government is creating more and more work for tribal councils, it is telling them that they will have to perform their job with even less resources. Funding cuts like these show that the government is not working with a coherent plan.

I am reminded again of the comments of National Chief Shawn Atleo, who wondered if the government's intentions were good but its policies were unfocused, or if the government knows full well what it is doing as it piles on the work while pulling back the resources that facilitate these tasks. The latter speak to intentions that could never be described as good. The national chief's opinion could well be based on the apparent absence of an overall plan when significant cuts are accompanied by increased expectations.

There is no playing to strengths or even acknowledgement of interplay between variables. In fact, cuts to the tribal council funding program limit the significant assistance those bodies could provide bands, which will now be forced to comply with the technological bureaucracy the bill would set in play.

Tribal councils provide advisory services to their member first nations and administer other Indian and northern programs. Here,

core funding cuts speak to the Conservative government's desire to limit their ability to do that job, which again is ultimately related to the requirements of Bill C-27.

Tribal councils are institutions established voluntarily by bands. In 2006-07, the program funded 78 tribal councils that served 471 first nations for about \$45 million. This is money well spent when we consider the good work that tribal councils do.

Five advisory services have been devolved to tribal councils: economic development, financial management, community planning, technical services and band governance. Certainly, cutting core funding will affect the output of many first nations.

We have to acknowledge that the work of tribal councils on advisory services dovetails with the demands that Bill C-27 would place on first nations. Whether for technical services, financial management or band governance, tribal councils have an important role to play in this process. However, the government saw fit to claw back their budgets ahead of the bill.

We understand that there is not an infinite amount of resources. That is why New Democrats would never make the kind of cuts and demands the government has been making, all the while pretending that one does not affect the other.

We also understand that first nations are already subject to various policy-based and legal requirements regarding the management and expenditure of federal public funds. If these new requirements did away with those or streamlined them, then it might make more sense. Instead, this just amounts to the creation of more red tape for first nations.

New Democrats remain convinced that changing the way that audited statements are made public does not require heavy-handed legislation. Any changes deemed necessary could be a requirement of funding arrangements that the department would have each first nation government sign.

We are concerned that Bill C-27 is overly punitive and ignores the simple solution. Indeed, bands that do not comply with the demands of the bill could have their funding withheld or have a funding agreement terminated by the minister. How would that address critical challenges like education, housing or infrastructure?

New Democrats do not see the need to divert more money to a new layer of bureaucracy that would reproduce much of what has already been done.

We understand that there can be problems associated with reporting on websites that are not apparent to everyone. As someone who represents a northern rural constituency, I can tell members that Internet connectivity is not always possible. With that in mind, website reporting could become a hurdle that some bands might not easily jump over, especially those in more remote communities.

Again, we believe that there are already sufficient reporting processes in place and that funding agreements could be modified to address any gaps. If the government had fully consulted with first nations, Bill C-27 would have been more complete and legitimate.

• (1545)

The Conservatives should have remembered the commitment they made at the Crown-first nations gathering; they should have consulted with first nations in the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People; and they should have reflected on the advice of the Auditor General and kept the pressing needs of Canada first nation communities in mind as they determined their legislative priorities. That would have served all involved much better.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is evident from the remarks that were just made that the NDP really wants to ensure that those first nations leaders who prefer not to provide their members with access to basic financial information will continue to have the right to do so. Indeed, during the clause-by-clause review of Bill C-27, which I participated in at committee, one of their amendments proposed removing the word “public” from before the word “disclosure” in clause 3.

Clearly, the NDP does not believe that first nation members should have the right to easily access basic financial information that is needed to hold elected leaders to account. The NDP members want to keep things private.

For example, at committee they also wanted to remove any reference to entities. They argued that information on band-owned businesses should not be included in the bill. Apparently the NDP does not believe that first nation members have the right to know the activities of their government and the businesses of which they are the ultimate owners.

The NDP believes it is okay for first nation members to continue to be denied access to basic financial information from their elected leaders who do not believe in transparency. Would the member care to comment on that?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do want to comment on that. I was at committee as well and I also heard the testimony. I also have a lot of first nations in my riding, and the issue the hon. member raised with respect to the band-owned businesses speaks competitiveness. That is the key point.

She also talked about the word “public”. For the government to want the public to know all the ins and outs of first nations is unheard of. She is asking them to be more accountable than the current government is.

It is fine to be accountable. First nations have basically said they are not worried about being accountable to their members, because that is what they want to be. The issue is that they are also being

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forced to put the finances of bands on a website, a website that some of them may not have access to.

The Conservatives say that first nations could put it on a different website, on anyone else's website, that they could go to their neighbour and put it on their website if their neighbour has connectivity. However, to put it on a website, they must have access to a website.

Does the hon. member expect first nation members to drive hundreds of miles to put the finances of the band on a website? It makes no sense.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I arrived in Canada in 1995, I found it very surprising that there was talk of two founding peoples, as though the first nations did not exist before the arrival of the Europeans.

Now, the House has before it a bill that deals with the financial transparency of the first nations. What does that mean? Does creating a bill on transparency mean that we think there is no transparency? I am getting the same message that I got in 1995, and that is a sort of contempt for and lack of understanding of Canada's first nations.

I would like my colleague to talk about her thoughts on the prejudices we have about the first nations.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question. When it comes to transparency, the first nations submit more reports to this government than any other organization or government. The first nations are therefore very transparent.

[*English*]

I would conclude by referring to the national chief's comments to the Prime Minister. He went on to say that there are only two conclusions to draw from the legislation that is being put forward, and not just this legislation but a lot of the legislation being put forward with respect to first nations. He said that either the Prime Minister understood but did not care, or he was allowing and supporting the behaviour to occur and did not understand but did care. Which one is it?

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we have before us Bill C-27, the so-called first nations financial transparency act. This is another example of how the Conservative government tells Canada's aboriginal people to do as it says, not as it does.

At committee witness after witness spoke of how accountability and transparency are vital concepts to effective governance. First nations have accepted that and they want to implement that as well on their own, as nations and as governments. I think of the first nations in my own community. Salt River First Nation has gone through the process of developing transparency. It has it together and it put it together itself. The pride this first nation takes in what it does comes from the fact that it has self-actualized in this regard.

Government Orders

Bill C-27 falls short in allowing first nations to stand for themselves as governments. It fails to develop workable government-to-government relationships. Instead, the bill treats aboriginal Canadians as wards of the state rather than being capable of governing themselves.

The Canadian Bar Association in a letter to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs stated:

The [Canadian Bar Association's National Aboriginal Law] Section believes the proposed Bill would not improve the capacity of First Nations to assume control over their own affairs. By focusing only on the expenditures of First Nations, the proposed legislation fails to address larger systemic issues of funding and responsibility for those issues.

The CBA goes on to say:

Given First Nations' inherent right to self-governance, dictating reporting requirements without sufficient consultation with First Nations is problematic. It fails to recognize the unique constitutional arrangements between First Nations and the federal government, and does little to move away from the paternalism which has historically defined this relationship.

It adds:

Ultimately, the Chief and Council should be accountable to the members of the First Nation, as those members are best positioned to say whether the salaries of Chief and Council are "reasonable" given the work they do in the particular context. Remuneration should be disclosed annually to the members of the First Nation....

Instead of working to encourage first nations to develop their own accountability and transparency protocols, the Conservatives have chosen to impose a system of reporting of which the Canadian Bar Association says:

—the consolidated financial statements and schedules of remuneration allow a far more detailed inspection of expenses than those released by provincial or territorial governments.

Speaking for the Assembly of First Nations, B.C. Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould told the committee:

Chiefs were clear in their assertion that these proposed measures...are both heavy-handed and unnecessary, and they suggest that first nations governments are corrupt and our leaders are not transparent and consequently need to be regulated by Ottawa.

As to who should be developing accountability and transparency protocols, Chief Wilson-Raybould was clear, saying:

—who should be responsible for determining the rules that apply to our governments and our governing bodies. The simple answer is that our nation should be....

In closing Chief Wilson-Raybould said:

It is troubling during this period of transition, as we move away from governance under the Indian Act, that the federal government seems to increasingly want to design our governance for us, in spite of the fundamental need for our nations to undertake this work ourselves in order for it to be legitimate.

Another shortfall with this legislation is the requirement to post financial information on the Internet for 10 years. Many first nations are located in very remote areas of Canada with little or no Internet access. Creating a website and maintaining it for years would be an additional cost to these first nations.

The Canadian Bar Association observed:

Most First Nations' communities consist of fewer than 500 residents, many in remote areas, which impacts both service delivery and operating expenses. Most communities do not have funding to build the infrastructure necessary for Internet access, or the resources to create and maintain their own websites.

In addition to the technical problems with posting on the Internet, as the Canadian Bar Association observes, there is an issue of cost.

However, this is not the only additional financial burden this act would place on first nations who are already seeing reduced funding for program delivery.

Chief Darcy Bear of the Whitecap Dakota First Nation told the committee:

One of the biggest problems for first nations is a lack of professional capacity, because of the way our communities are funded, through band support funding. A lot of our communities are funded and we have financial clerks. But a financial clerk cannot keep pace with the onerous reporting requirements of the federal government.

First nations, with their limited professional capacity, are already struggling to meet their reporting burden. First nation communities have an estimated average of 168 reports and in some communities that goes up to 200 reports that are required yearly by the federal government.

In December 2006 the Auditor General pointed out that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs "alone obtains more than 60,000 reports a year from over 600 First Nations". The Auditor General concluded that "the resources devoted to the current reporting system could be better used to provide direct support to communities".

● (1555)

The comment from the Canadian Bar Association is particularly telling. It states:

The legislation will not increase the capacity required to facilitate best practices of First Nations' governments. Financial statements alone do not provide a meaningful measure of performance, nor are they a fair reflection of community priorities. In addition, non-compliance with onerous reporting burdens can lead to disastrous consequences, such as those flowing from the recent housing crisis at Attawapiskat First Nation. Withholding funds for non-compliance might result in the federal government failing to meet its constitutional obligation to provide essential services to all Canadians.

The Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada raised a key question about these increased costs, saying, "These types of reporting lead to increased costs. Who pays for these additional costs?" It is clear who would pay. The aboriginal people of Canada would pay through reduced government programs and services on their reserves and in their bands. Funding that should be going to improve the lives of Canada's aboriginal people would instead be spent on more red tape and paperwork.

Then there is the requirement that first nations must be accountable to more than their membership. Chief Wilson-Raybould addressed this in her testimony. She said:

There is, of course, no concern where those receiving the audited consolidated financial statements are our citizens. This is, however, not the case where there is a requirement for public dissemination. This is a material departure from what was proposed in Bill C-575 and the precedent set under the first nations fiscal management act.

Government Orders

The last area I want to address is the impact that the bill would have on the economic development of first nations. The Conservatives pretend the bill would improve economic development when it would be likely to drive business away. Chief Darcy Bear warned the committee that the bill would result in the private sector deciding not to invest or partner with first nations. He said:

—we want to make sure that this bill is not going to scare away businesses from our community. You have the private sector off reserve and they have certain reporting requirements, but if they go on reserve and they have to disclose their competitive information to all of their competitors, they're going to say they don't want to go on reserve, that it's not right for them.

In her testimony, Chief Wilson-Raybould wondered why the bill would not be in line with public sector accounting standards when it came to business information.

The bill has little to do with transparency and accountability. The bill would not increase economic development of first nations, rather, it would make first nations less attractive to business. The bill would not move first nations toward self-government, rather, it would go back to the days when aboriginal Canadians were treated as wards of the state. The effect of the bill would be to go back to paternalism and colonialism.

As Lloyd Phillips, who sits on the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake near Montreal observed, in part, “It seems like (Bill C-27) is really about blaming aboriginal poverty on fiscal mismanagement instead of chronic underfunding”.

Can we not start to treat first nations in a fashion that deserves their respect, that makes their way in this country acceptable? They need to build their institutions. That is clearly obvious. We do not need to tell them how to build their institutions. We do not need to instruct them every step of the way on how they are going to do things. They need the independence and the strength that comes from independence to build successful communities and governments, and make them really a part of this great nation.

• (1600)

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will just take a minute to read into the record some comments on my hon. friend's speech.

First, it is important to note that nothing in the bill adds to the existing reporting burden faced by first nations. Instead, the bill represents a minimum set of standards with respect to financial transparency, which is not currently being followed by many first nations. We expect many first nations will adapt easily and in fact will go further than the basic requirements laid out in the bill. Many will take this opportunity to put into place their own practices that aim to enhance the overall accuracy and accountability of their governments. In this way, the bill will serve as a catalyst for change in many communities, which will lead to greater confidence in many first nation governments.

Greater confidence and transparency result in increased opportunities for flexible multi-year arrangements, which will come with streamlined reporting. Over time as these practices become commonplace, first nations will be in a much stronger position to demonstrate that they are candidates for more flexible funding arrangements.

Let me just share with the House what the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has been doing over the past while. Back in July 2010, it launched a reduced reporting initiative to address the various issues raised by the Office of the Auditor General. It also responded to recommendations from the 2006 independent blue ribbon panel on grants and contributions, and the policy on transfer payments released by the government in 2008.

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to interrupt. The member has already used up a minute and a half of a five-minute question and answer period and has not gotten to his question. I will have to direct the member to ask the question immediately.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, I will just pose it this way. In 2011-12, the Atlantic region put in place a two-year pilot project that simplified reporting requirements. Can the hon. member tell us what has happened with that arrangement, that pilot project, and where it stands today?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to what my colleague said in his discourse, which I think was great but perhaps he should take the time to make a speech, or perhaps he cannot because time allocation has been put on him.

The member said the bill is a catalyst for change. The bill is not a catalyst. A catalyst is something that assists the process. The bill is very heavy-handed. The bill tells first nations what they have to do. If the bill were a catalyst, it would have incentives for behaviour. It would try to work through consultation to come up with an agreeable system that we could all work together on.

This is not a catalyst. There is no way it is. A basic understanding of that word says that the bill is not that.

• (1605)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that Canada's Auditor General has actually been talking, for a while now, about the excessive amount of paperwork in terms of first nations having to report. In fact, the Auditor General's office has been calling on the government to take action to reduce unnecessary first nation reporting requirements.

When we take a look at Bill S-8, which should have had a great deal of discussion prior to its introduction, or even its drafting, one could question whether or not the government is fair in saying that it will not increase reporting requirements. We know Bill S-8 is going to do nothing to address that particular issue of reduction.

I wonder if the member of Parliament would like to provide comment on that important issue, which the Auditor General has raised.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the whole problem with this type of legislation goes back to its beginning.

We can talk about how it may or may not be implemented, but the problem lies in its conception. If we do not deal with that, we will never come to grips with the basic principles that should guide our relationship between the first nations and the federal government. We need to work very hard to get to those principles.

Government Orders

I am sure that the Auditor General, in her desire to see information flow correctly, has come to some conclusions that the member will probably share with us at another time. I want to stress that the importance here is in the principles that guide the legislation.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members would be hard pressed to find anyone who is more aware of the need for and proud of this legislation than I. As my hon. colleagues know, I have been championing this issue for a very long time. It is almost two years ago now that I introduced Bill C-575, the first iteration of today's first nations financial transparency act. I believed then, as I do now, that first nations residents, like all Canadians, deserve transparency and accountability from their officials.

Indeed, more than just saying they are accountable in terms of their salaries and the reimbursement of expenses, these officials need to demonstrate they are absolutely transparent when it comes to reporting their earnings. This is what people in many first nations communities are demanding. That is why I originally brought forward my private member's bill.

In a nutshell, the purpose of Bill C-575 was to ensure that public funds that flow to first nations leaders are publicly disclosed. There is an existing process for band members to request financial information from their leaders. At the moment, if those requests are not met, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development must step in and release the information.

My bill would have simplified the process, making disclosure automatic instead of going through this time-consuming and onerous process, which puts the minister in an awkward position and which undermines democracy, as first nations members cannot exercise their democratic rights without access to adequate information.

While some chiefs and councillors routinely release such financial information to their community members, unfortunately not all first nations achieve this standard. Those that do achieve this standard recognize the value in ensuring that their decisions and actions are clearly visible for all to see. They respect that their members have a fundamental right to know how public money is being spent. They know this information is vital to making wise, informed decisions about activities in their communities. They also understand that sharing this knowledge encourages an atmosphere of openness and trust between band councils and the community members they serve.

The problem is that not all band leaders see it that way. Current practices are uneven across the country. Some first nations will only release information about spending and the reimbursement of government officials' expenses on request. Others outright refuse to do so. It is precisely because some first nation leaders will not release this information that community members are forced to ask Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to provide them with the details on their behalf.

I heard from individual members of first nations communities who complained that their local governments refused to release financial information. They have told me that access to this information is important and necessary for their communities. I know they are not alone in feeling this way. There was enormous support all across Canada for Bill C-575 when it was working its way through Parliament.

Indeed, many first nation band members have been complaining for years about the lack of accountability among their political leaders and their unwillingness to provide details about the band's finances and management.

Jo-Ann Nahanee, an advocate for transparency and accountability, is reported in the press as saying:

...for self-government to be successful, you need to have your members of your community—the participants of your government—be involved by informing them. My band does not do that.

She went on to explain:

There is an underlying fear on the reserve because there is a reliance on chief and council for welfare, for income. You are taking about people in poverty...and they are scared to speak up because they are scared to have these things taken away, so nobody speaks out.

That is just one example. There are similar complaints coming from other corners of the country, such as those brought to our attention by the Peguis Accountability Coalition. The coalition was formed by community members who are frustrated because they cannot access salary or other financial information about their band. They insist that those in power must be held accountable.

● (1610)

I can assure the House I am not implying that all first nations are reporting such problems or that the activities of all band leaders should be suspect; far from it. In fact, I am extremely proud of the many successful first nations in my home province of Saskatchewan whose leaders are wonderful role models in this regard. A perfect example is Darcy Bear, Chief of the Whitecap Dakota First Nation. Chief Bear is one of the biggest proponents of this legislation. He is on the record as stating:

This bill will mean more accountability of First Nation leaders to our people. Transparent and accountable First Nation governments support a strong environment for investment leading to greater economic development".

Leaders like Chief Bear know that, in addition to better serving their community members, increased transparency and accountability pave the way to greater private sector investment and economic prosperity for first nations. As encouraged as I am by first nations chiefs and councils that recognize this reality, the fact remains that others do not. A sizeable proportion of first nations residents are not satisfied that they have access to the information they need to hold their officials to account. This has been substantiated by research produced by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy. It found that 25% of first nation individuals surveyed as part of its aboriginal governments index say that salary information for public officials is not available to band members. Thanks to the legislation before us, that will soon no longer be the case.

As we are aware, Bill C-575 died on the order paper when the last election was called. However, that may have been a blessing in disguise because its replacement, Bill C-27, builds on my original private member's bill and makes it even better.

Government Orders

While my private member's bill was unable to pass through the House of Commons before the election, by reintroducing it this fall, our government has reinforced its commitment to transparency and accountability at all levels of government. The new first nations financial transparency act would fulfill the 2011 Speech from the Throne commitment to support strong, democratic, transparent and accountable first nation governments by requiring that chiefs and councillors publish their salaries and expenses.

This act goes beyond what I had originally envisioned in Bill C-575. The new legislation would expand the scope of the information to be publicly disclosed over and above the salaries and expenses of chiefs and councillors. This bill also includes first nations' audited consolidated financial statements. This financial information would be made available to community members and the Canadian public on the individual first nation's website or on the website of a tribal council or partner organization. In addition, the audited consolidated financial statements and schedule of remuneration would be published on the website of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada once they are made available by the first nation. These steps would ensure that first nation community members have the information they need to make informed decisions about their governments.

What we are asking band councils to do is only what municipal, provincial and federal governments are already doing. They would retain all the rights and responsibilities they currently have. For example, the act would not set salary levels for chiefs and councillors. Decisions such as these would remain the responsibility of the first nation. It would be up to communities to determine the appropriate level of remuneration for their officials. All that Bill C-27 would change is that this information would be publicly disclosed to ensure that community members have the information they need to decide if levels of compensation are reasonable and justified.

All members of first nations have a right to know how much their chiefs and councillors are being paid. It is this knowledge that helps eliminate controversy over compensation and focuses the public discussion where it really belongs: on fundamental quality of life issues such as housing, health care and education. All Canadians, not only members of first nations communities, should be able to access detailed information on how much first nations chiefs and councillors are being paid. Accountability is a fundamental principle of Canadian political life that we all know to be true. This is the basis of laws that legislatures across Canada have passed to clarify how much elected officials and senior executives in governments earn each year.

• (1615)

All other levels of government across Canada, including ours, have also established rules to fully disclose the amount and nature of expenses being reimbursed to elected and unelected officials of government. We in this House abide by such rules. Therefore, we are certainly not asking anything of first nation leaders that we do not expect of ourselves.

Another major element of Bill C-27 is that it would ensure we achieve the goal of greater transparency without increasing the reporting burden for first nations. The bill would simply make public

some of the documents that are already being prepared by first nations for submission to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada as part of their obligations under their funding agreements.

As proud as I am of my earlier efforts to address these issues in the last Parliament, I have to admit that the new legislation before us is even better than Bill C-575. Bill C-27 would ensure that the remuneration and expenses paid by a first nation to its political leaders would be disclosed. This includes individuals working in their capacity as chief and councillors, as well as their personal capacities, for instance, if they are also employees or contractors with the first nation.

The act would also ensure that a first nation's audited consolidated financial statements and schedule of remuneration and expenses would be disclosed to the public. It would ensure that this information is posted, both on a first nation website and on the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's website for a minimum of 10 years.

The bill would have improved enforcement powers. It contains a provision that would guarantee a first nation member, a member of the general public or the minister could apply to a superior court for an order requiring the council of a first nation to publish the information. In addition, in cases where first nations are not compliant, the minister would have authority under the act to assess remedies that exist in grant or contribution funding agreements with the first nation. These range from requiring the first nation to develop an appropriate action plan for disclosure, to withholding funds from a grant or a contribution or terminating a grant or contribution agreement.

These mechanisms are already available to the minister under the funding agreements. However, with greater powers being placed in the hands of first nation members, we would expect these mechanisms would only be used as a last resort. Indeed, there is no need for it ever to come to that. All the band councils need to do is release the basic information that all other governments across the country already do.

As I have noted, many first nation leaders currently provide such information because they know it is in the best interest of their community. They recognize it is good for public relations and building trust between electors and their governing officials. They understand it is good for business, as successful communities like Whitecap Dakota First Nation, in Saskatchewan, have proven. Ultimately, they realize it is good for democracy. Indeed, it is vital to ensuring that the democratic rights of first nations people are upheld.

It is beyond me why anyone, aboriginal or otherwise, could possibly have a problem with this legislation. First nations members who have been calling for these improvements would undoubtedly like to know the answer to that too. Actually, I am sure they would prefer that we simply pass this legislation so they can get on with building strong communities and stronger economies.

I urge all hon. members do just that and vote with us to make Bill C-27 the law of the land.

Government Orders

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her speech. I have to say that this government's slogan seems to be, "do as I say, not as I do."

Unfortunately, we are once again being muzzled in the debate on Bill C-27. A time allocation motion was adopted for about the 30th time. I just wanted to point that out.

My first question for the member opposite is the following: the first nations asked the government to work with them to develop better transparency and governance measures on the reserves. Why is the Conservative government ignoring this opportunity to work together?

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, it was over two years ago that I introduced my private member's bill. That bill was introduced as a result of many first nations community members contacting me, contacting my colleagues, with a desire to access this sort of information and with an inability to do so.

With the exception of first nation governments operating under the Indian Act, governments in Canada, provincial, federal and municipal, adhere to legislation that ensures transparency of the financial statements of their governments. This is something that first nation members are calling for. We had a robust debate at the time that my private member's bill was making its way through the House. I believe we have had another good debate on this issue, and I would encourage the member to support this legislation.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar developed her private member's bill in reaction to complaints from members of first nation communities who could not access the financial information needed to hold their leadership to account.

Would the member share with us what she heard that led to the development of her private member's bill?

• (1625)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, when I introduced Bill C-575, it had become apparent that there were many members in first nations communities who were wanting to access information about the expenses of their chiefs and councillors and how things were being managed in their communities, and they were not able to do so.

As I mentioned, some were given the information; some were outright refused, and others proactively gave this information before it was asked for. I heard many stories from first nations community members about the concerns in their communities, and I continue to receive letters, phone calls and emails from first nation members who are now asking where my private member's bill is and when that piece of legislation will be enacted.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member would acknowledge that there is a difference between a private member's bill and a government bill. When the Government of Canada introduces a bill, there is an obligation that the government work in co-operation with and consult with first nation leaders prior to even the drafting of the bill.

However, there are concerns on the part of a large number of people. The member has a right, as we all have rights, to introduce private member's bills, but given that her private member's bill was converted into a government bill, could the member share with the House who it is that she consulted with, in particular, first nation leaders? Could she say that first nation leader *x* sat down and talked with her, so we have a sense that she actually met with, consulted and had that first-hand uptake prior to introducing her private member's bill?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I know the member has been asking this question over and over again as we have been having this debate. I spoke with Chief Atleo when I introduced my private member's bill. I spoke with Chief Darcy Bear. I spoke with many members of first nations communities who wanted access to this kind of information.

Does it mean that everyone supported my private member's bill? No, but most of the community members on first nations definitely support the bill. They are calling for this bill. They definitely want to see the ability to access this information be enacted in legislation. It provides a road map to first nations' elected officials for accountability and transparency.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to follow up on that last question and answer, I wonder if the member would be prepared to table in this House the names of the people she did consult, the band members and the first nations.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member knows that when a member of Parliament meets with individuals to talk about their concerns, about issues they have, those conversations need to be kept confidential.

There are privacy issues that one would have in tabling the names of first nations members who, as I have explained in my speeches, not only today but in prior debates, are very concerned about the repercussions they face when they even ask for this information.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to commend the member for her initiative, her leadership in having introduced the bill and having listened to the voices of grassroots aboriginal Canadians.

I wonder if she would care to comment on the ongoing opposition to this initiative by members of the parties opposite. Why is it that they seem more concerned about the views of the people from whom information is being sought rather than people seeking the information? Let us say there was a proposal to expand the Access to Information Act, would the opposition be asking if ministers and agency heads in the federal government had been consulted? Of course not. They would be more interested in the rights of ordinary Canadians.

Could the member comment on that? Why does she think opposition members are more focused on the desire by certain members of the established leadership to diminish openness and accountability rather than grassroots people desire to broaden transparency and accountability with respect to first nations' finances?

Government Orders

•(1630)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer that question.

I think I said earlier in my speech, I cannot understand why all members in this House, all Canadians, whether they are aboriginal or not, do not get behind this legislation and support the principles of accountability and transparency that are foundational to the work we do as elected officials, and that all Canadians deserve from their elected officials. I believe first nations community members, like all Canadians, deserve that financial accountability and transparency from their elected leaders.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Vancouver Kingsway, International Trade; the hon. member for Windsor West, Public Safety; the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, Employment Insurance.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe I can help the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism in terms of understanding what is in fact the difference.

If there is a prime minister of a country who says that the government wants to change a law within the immigration department, we believe that ultimately the prime minister, through his cabinet, and the minister of immigration who gets to sit around that cabinet table, will be consulted, maybe not necessarily under the current Prime Minister, and a sense of consensus would be built within the cabinet. Then the law would ultimately be proposed and brought to the House of Commons.

We need to recognize the uniqueness of what we are trying to do through this bill. There is an obligation for the Government of Canada to consult with first nations leaders. The government has not recognized that.

In responding to my question, the member said that she somewhat anticipated that I would ask this question. I was a bit surprised in terms of the answer that she provided, given that she knew I would ask it. We all need to be concerned about it.

Let me repeat a specific question that I asked a little earlier today, and then I will give the answer that followed.

The question I had asked was for the member for Kootenay—Columbia, a member from the government benches. I said, “My question to the member is this. Can he provide to the House in any fashion the names of anyone within that first nations leadership whom the government actually consulted with prior to the drafting of the legislation?” I reinforced it with “Can he list some of those first nations leaders with whom the government had consulted with to come up with the legislation or the ideas behind this legislation?”

The member for Kootenay—Columbia responded with this, “Mr. Speaker, certainly we consulted. Between January 1, 2011 and September 25, 2012, the department received approximately 250 formal complaints from people within the first nations communities of Canada saying they could not access the information that they

wanted about their chiefs and their councillors. Bill C-27 will make this happen”.

That is not consultation. That is not what the government has a responsibility to do when it comes to making changes and passing laws in Canada. That is virtually any type of law. One would like to think is more than just consumer-based complaints and the government then jumps up and changes a law.

There is a wide variety of stakeholders on any given issue throughout this nation that would like to contribute to the development of public policy and there is an obligation for ministers to go out and do their homework. We know we have been let down by a number of ministers who have not gone out to do their homework when they have introduced legislation in the chamber. There have even been ministers who have gone against what the public wanted. I could give a number of examples of that, whether it is the Canadian Wheat Board or some of the refugee legislation that was introduced.

When we are passing legislation dealing with our first nations, there is that much more of an obligation for the government to sit down with the first nations leadership in order to try to improve upon the situation.

For the last number of days, we have been talking about finances, transparency and accountability. All Canadians want to see more transparency and accountability. This is not a they versus us. It should not be the Government of Canada saying that it demands that first nations leaders become accountable and transparent.

•(1635)

The vast majority of our first nations leaders say that they too want to see accountability and transparency. They believe in it, much like the average Canadian believes in it. However, we need to recognize that there has to be a process to achieve that.

What we have had is a very eager member of the Conservative caucus who brought forward a private member's bills in previous sessions saying after reflection and meeting with constituents, the bill was drafted. Apparently there was consultation after the bill was done. She did not say whether they supported the bill or her particular initiative. However, then we had the government of the day adopt that bill and make it a government bill. The bill is going to pass. We know that.

It is the type of thing which I suspect, if the government had done its homework, there could have been and should have been a lot more incorporated in it and maybe some aspects of it even deleted or modified if there was goodwill from the Government of Canada to sit down with some of those individuals on the front lines trying to deliver these services.

Government Orders

The Auditor General of Canada has made it very clear, not just once but on several occasions, that we need to see meaningful action in order to reduce unnecessary first nations reporting requirements, that we need to look at streamlining the overwhelming reporting burden currently there. The government, as opposed to reflecting on what the Auditor General of Canada has said, is advancing its ideas without doing due diligence or consulting with our first nations leadership. As a result, we find ourselves in the situation we have today, where the government ultimately has to force passage of the bill through time allocation.

What would have happened if the government had done its work, taken the responsibility and treated first nations with the respect that they are due? If that had taken place, we might have been able to achieve some of the things the Auditor General talked about that would not have taken away from accountability and transparency. We could have even had a bill that had more accountability and transparency. After all, it was the first nations that ultimately suggested that we should look at having a first nations auditor general.

Look at the benefit that not only the nation of Canada has had as a direct result of an auditor general, but the benefits that individual provinces have had by having auditors general in place. It provides a great deal of accountability and more transparency. This idea was talked about during the Kelowna accord.

However, we find ourselves in a situation where we have the Auditor General of Canada saying that there is already a heavy burden. We also have leadership within our aboriginal community, in particular our first nations community, that also want to see action on this issue. However, the government is doing it in a piecemeal fashion. If the government were genuine in wanting to really resolve the issue of accountability and transparency, there would have been a better way.

• (1640)

I had the opportunity to address this issue previously. One of the things I talked a great deal about at that time was the Kelowna accord. I believe the Kelowna accord is an example of the way a government should work with our first nations in order to achieve success. That is the reality of it. If we canvassed individuals, we would find wide support for the Kelowna accord,

Stakeholders, including the different levels of government, first nations leaders, members of other aboriginal communities and other interested parties sat down over a period of months and brought up issues that concerned them, including the issue of financial accountability and transparency. This is something very real. It was there.

I raised the issue the other day inside the House. Members were commenting on the Kelowna accord, so I said that perhaps we should table the Kelowna accord so members could actually read it.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: It's a press release.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: The member can call it what he wants, Mr. Speaker, but the bottom line is the accord was achieved, and that is a fact. The other thing that is a fact sadly, is the government that replaced the Paul Martin government deemed the accord unnecessary and ripped it up. The government did not want anything to do

with it. That is the second reality. That has led to many different issues.

I said that members might like to read the accord as it seemed some had not. I asked for the unanimous support of the House to table the accord and much to my surprise someone said no. That individual did not want me to table it. I was somewhat taken aback by that because after all there seems to be a genuine lack of awareness about the Kelowna accord by members on the government benches. If government members were a bit more sensitive to what is inside the Kelowna accord, they might be a bit more sympathetic as to why they are receiving the type of opposition they are getting today on this legislation.

Once again, I managed to get my hands on this wonderful document. I commend former prime minister Paul Martin for his efforts. It is critically important that a prime minister have the ambition to achieve things of this nature. Many within and outside the aboriginal community thought the Martin government did a fabulous job on the Kelowna accord. I want to read a couple of parts of the accord that are really relevant to this debate.

A lot of the questions that I and the New Democratic Party are asking are focused on the relationship between Ottawa and our first nations communities. We have gone through all sorts of other debates over the last year dealing with first nations issues. Time and time again the issue of consultation, or the lack thereof, has come up. This has really become a problem for the government.

• (1645)

I thought it might be appropriate to highlight a couple of aspects of it because it makes reference to the importance of consultations.

On page 2 of the Kelowna accord it talks about a 10-year commitment to closing the gap. I am going to quote directly from it:

First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders are committed to strengthening relationships between Aboriginal peoples and federal, provincial and territorial governments. These relationships will be based on enhanced collaboration, effective working partnerships and mutual respect. In that spirit, First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders are launching a 10-year dedicated effort to closing the gap in the quality of life that now exists between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. The ultimate goal of this effort is to address the serious conditions that contribute to poverty among Aboriginal peoples and to ensure that they can more fully benefit from and contribute to Canada's prosperity. In strengthening relationships, all parties are committed to move forward in ways that build on the principles enshrined in the Constitution including the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights.

When it talks about the principles of the Kelowna accord, we should think of the whole idea of consultation and obligation. I just talked about trying to narrow the 10-year gap. In that paragraph, we get the sense of the importance of building a relationship. We have to ask ourselves what type of relationship the current government is building with first nations, when we cannot get a direct response when we ask it to tell us who it is meeting with prior to introducing bills before the House of Commons.

Government Orders

If Conservatives had done that, if they had met with some of the first nations leaders, I believe we would have a healthier and stronger bill today. It would have provided equal or greater accountability and transparency on reserves and beyond them. I have faith and confidence that there is already strength within the leadership of first nations that is equal or greater than the types of transparency and accountability clauses we are seeing in the current legislation. The will would have been there, and I suggest that it could have been even better legislation. The government chose not to develop that relationship, and that is unfortunate.

I will go back to the Kelowna accord, based on the importance of consulting before bringing in legislation that would impact first nations communities:

The following principles will guide how the parties will work together:

If I have one minute left, I do not have enough time to read what I wanted to, unfortunately. A member suggested I could ask for leave. I would welcome the opportunity to speak longer, if I may.

• (1650)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member have leave to continue his speech beyond 20 minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: It appears that he does not, and he now has 30 seconds to complete his speech.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am not a very good speed reader, but I would highly recommend that members read the Kelowna accord. It is good reading for all members of the Conservative caucus. To that degree, I would ask for the consent of the House to table this document so members would have clear access to it.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I have the opportunity to ask, the answer appears to be no; there is not unanimous consent.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Peterborough.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate all day and I have had the opportunity to listen to this member on many occasions making interventions. However, today most of it is around one single subject that he cannot seem to get his mind past.

One of the things that has occurred to me, and frankly I really think it matters, is that in every Parliament every once in a while in this position one has the opportunity to do something that is truly transformational and truly important. We have had that in the time since I have been elected. I think of the Federal Accountability Act, the 2009 federal budget and the economic action plan.

I think of other Parliaments that have voted on things that were significant, such as John Diefenbaker's Canadian Bill of Rights and the U.S. free trade agreement. These are things that have fundamentally transformed Canada and made a positive impact. The record of members who have supported those things is something that is celebrated today.

I wonder how this member will feel when he looks back 20 years from now and sees that he had the opportunity to provide transparency and accountability, which is something I believe will become the mainstay, expectation and right of every single first nation citizen. How will he look back at his time when he had the opportunity to make a difference, to stand up for transparency, accountability and those less fortunate in Canada, but he voted against it, the way he has indicated here today?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question by posing a question.

One has to wonder how it is that the Prime Minister of Canada is going to look in the mirror when he had an opportunity to work with our first nation communities on an issue of accountability and transparency, something on which we know our first nation communities very much want to work.

The Prime Minister had the opportunity to build that relationship on something that really was not that difficult to do. However, he put a pass on working with our first nations and instead followed a private member's bill from a backbencher that excludes a significant percentage of the population of our country.

I think that if we were to talk to our first nations, their leaders and others, most people would say that, at the very least, when the will is there for more accountability and transparency, why would one not work within our first nation communities to have a bill that would pass unanimously in the chamber without time allocation being required.

• (1655)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I tried to listen attentively to what the member had to say. I wonder if he would like to comment on what I believe to be the real problem here.

The real problem is that if one goes to a regional office of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada, there is nobody there. They have all been fired. There are a few people, but they are not taking responsibility for anything. They will not see anybody. They will not talk to any first nation people. They will not sign anything that needs to be signed. No one is taking any responsibility. If a band member has an issue, he is not getting any help from the government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member brings up a valid point. We debate legislation, but what is actually happening in our communities?

It was not that long ago that the leader of the Liberal Party brought in a motion that recognized the need for clean running water. This is a serious issue—not for 98% of Canadians, who turn on the tap and water comes out. They get water for drinking, for the toilet, for the bathtub and so forth. When the motion was introduced, it was great because all members from all political parties voted in favour of it, recognizing the crisis that was there. However, we need to take the next step. We need to ensure the services are going to be there to meet the needs, as my colleague pointed out. We need to ensure there are the necessary resources to make a difference.

Most Canadians would be quite surprised to find there are huge numbers of people who do not have running water and yet they live here in Canada.

Government Orders

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the member speak, and the one thing that really struck me is that we keep on talking about wanting to speak and speak, and it reminds me of what the Liberals did with the emissions, when they signed onto the Kyoto protocol and did nothing with it except talk about it, until we formed government when something actually started to happen and we saw emission reductions.

The member also said it is not an “us versus them” as far as accountability goes, yet why does he want to make it that way? The member should be supportive of this. He says all Canadians, including aboriginal communities, desire accountability, yet he is talking about a bill that brings forward accountability. Does the member not believe that there should be accountability on the part of a leadership group of elected officials, to the people who elected them?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the idea of accountability and transparency is something that is supported by all members of the House of Commons. Verbally it is something that is supported. Having said that, I also believe that the population as a whole supports more accountability and more transparency. That includes individuals who are leaders within our first nations.

If we take a look at the importance of first nations, treaty rights and so forth, we see there is a moral obligation and a legal obligation that we work with first nations in the development of legislation and policy. This has been agreed to in principle by governments of all political stripes in the past. It seems to have escaped the Prime Minister, and we would suggest it is probably the single biggest thing that is missing here, because there are many individuals within our first nation leadership who would have loved to have been able to participate in coming up with a better bill that would have provided more accountability, more transparency, but were denied that because of the manner in which it was brought in.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why did the Liberals try to pass the First Nations Governance Act against the wishes of the first nations, which were trying to develop their own transparency measures?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues I brought up was that there are those who wanted to see an aboriginal auditor general or first nations auditor general. Having served inside the Manitoba legislature and now here in Ottawa, I recognize the important role that auditors general have to play in terms of the issue of accountability and transparency.

Who knows what would have happened, because we know there is significant support for that concept within the leadership of the first nations community? Had there been a consultation done, we might have actually seen something of that nature incorporated into the bill or something separate. I would suggest that is a lost opportunity.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as many of speeches here today have underlined, there is no shortage of good reasons to support this legislation. Among the most powerful is the fact that this act will

address a glaring deficiency in the way first nations governments operate at the moment. They are currently the only governments in Canada that do not adhere to transparency and accountability legislation.

While many first nations governments have put in place sound accountability practices to ensure transparency, there is no legislated requirement for them to release the information to community members and too many do not. All other jurisdictions across the country have realized the importance of putting financial transparency requirements into legislation. They understand that governments must be accountable in exchange for legitimacy in the eyes of the people they serve and that they must lead by example.

Several of my colleagues have touched on various aspects of provincial and territorial legislation in their presentations today. They have noted that in addition to the demands they make of their own elected officials, most provinces and territories have laws that also require municipalities to make financial documents public.

This highlights an important point. Even though municipalities are governments in their own right, they are required to follow provincial legislation with respect to financial transparency. In many respects, this parallels some aspects of the government-to-government relationship of first nations with the federal government. For this reason, I believe it may be helpful to explore what municipal governments are expected to do, to appreciate just how commonplace and beneficial these financial transparency laws are.

I am convinced this underscores that the provisions in the first nations financial transparency act are not only reasonable but also entirely do-able, as the many municipal governments from coast to coast to coast demonstrate when implementing their own versions of financial accountability legislation. For example, look at what municipalities in Ontario are expected to do when it comes to issuing annual financial statements. Section 294.1 of the Ontario Municipal Act says:

A municipality shall, for each fiscal year, prepare annual financial statements for the municipality in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles for local governments as recommended, from time to time, by the Public Sector Accounting Board of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants.

Section 295 stipulates that within 60 days of receiving the audited financial statements of the municipality for the previous years, the municipal treasurer must publish this information in a local newspaper. This includes a copy of the audited financial statements, the notes to the financial statements, the auditor's report and the tax rate information for the current and previous year contained in the financial review.

Government Orders

Manitoba makes similar demands on municipalities under the province's municipal act. Section 183(1) requires a municipality to prepare annual financial statements for the immediately preceding year in accordance with the generally accepted accounting principles for municipal governments recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. It also demands that any modification of those principles or any supplementary accounting standards or principles be approved by the minister. Furthermore, section 194 of the act requires the municipality to notify the public that the report and the municipality's financial statements are available for inspection by anyone who asks to see them at the municipal office during regular business hours.

In my home province, Saskatchewan's municipal act is even more precise. It demands that on or before June 15 of each year, municipalities prepare financial statements. Again, they must conform with the generally accepted accounting principles for municipal governments recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. As in Ontario and Manitoba, the municipality also needs to publicize its financial statements, or at least a summary of them, as well as the auditor's report of the financial statements by September 1 of the following fiscal year. In addition, it has to submit its financial statements and the auditor's report on the financial statements to the minister by July 1 of the year following the financial year. Again, anyone in the province is entitled, at any time during regular business hours, to inspect and obtain copies of these documents.

● (1705)

The Province of Alberta's Municipal Government Act is almost a carbon copy of other acts. Like other provinces I have mentioned, it demands that each municipality prepare annual financial statements for the preceding fiscal year. It also stipulates that the statements must be in accordance with the accounting principles for municipal governments recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, and that any modification to them needs to be established by the minister through regulation. Likewise, each municipality has to make its financial statements, or a summary of them, along with the auditor's report of the financial statements, available to the public. That needs to be done by May 1 following the year for which the financial statements have been prepared. However, Alberta expects even more from municipalities. Their financial statements need to include the municipality's debt limit, including the debt as defined in regulations under section 271 of the act.

Newfoundland and Labrador is another jurisdiction that insists municipalities' financial statements and auditors reports be made available for public inspection during normal business hours. Like the previous provinces I have mentioned, under Newfoundland and Labrador's Municipalities Act, municipalities' financial statements need to be made available for public inspection. The only fees involved are the actual costs to provide a copy.

All of the rules and regulations I have just described apply strictly to municipal governments, essentially the equivalent counterpart of first nations governments in our federation. Then, there are various laws regarding the remuneration and expenses of provincial, territorial and municipal leaders. I will not take the time to describe each jurisdiction's laws in great detail, but here is a sampling. The

Government of the Northwest Territories, for example, requires the disclosure of the salaries of elected officials. The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act stipulates that the speaker must table a report that sets out in detail the indemnities and allowances paid to members and the expenses incurred by members in the previous fiscal year.

In addition, within two years after the polling day for a general election, the speaker must establish an independent commission and appoint three individuals who are independent, neutral and knowledgeable. Ten months following the independent commission's formation, the independent commissioners review the indemnities and any allowance or reimbursements for expenses payable, or other benefits available to members. They also have to provide a report to the speaker, setting out any recommendations for changes that they determine should be made.

The report needs to be very detailed. It has to break down the total amount of annual salary paid to each member, the total value of additional indemnities paid to each member holding an additional office, and the total dollar value of allowances for expenses as well as any other expenses and allowances. Apart from this report, the Government of the Northwest Territories publishes the salary and benefit allowances for its members on the legislative assembly website.

I could point to almost any province or territory and we would find similar laws or regulations governing officials' compensation. While the wording varies from one jurisdiction to another, they all require that the salaries of elected politicians be published along with any other special allowances that they receive. They also demand that this information be released to the public, whether within the legislature, council chamber, on government websites, in the local media or some combination of these locations.

● (1710)

This is true in Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and many other jurisdictions. These governments and the elected officials that lead them recognize both the necessity and the advantages of making information easily accessible to electors. They know it builds trust, inspires confidence and ensures the public understands how public funds are spent.

Most of all, these leaders respect the public has a right to know. They realize they are accountable for their actions. These publicly released financial statements demonstrate that government leaders are not afraid to stand behind their record. First nations leaders stand to enjoy the same benefits once Bill C-27 is passed.

By acknowledging that members of first nations have the same rights to information as all other Canadians and making financial information readily available to them, they can instill confidence among the electorate in their capacity to lead and meet the community's needs.

Making salary and expense information open to scrutiny will send a clear signal that they recognize that band members are the ultimate owners of any business owned by their band. It will formally recognize that local residents have the right to know what the value of those businesses are.

Government Orders

Rather than adding a layer of complexity, as some fear, the legislation may actually lighten the load for first nations officials. Bill C-27 would remove any cloud of uncertainty that currently hangs over some communities. All this bill would do is mirror what other jurisdictions, provinces, territories and municipalities already do without any problems.

I fully understand that it is only human nature to resist change. If we are totally honest, perhaps some of us as parliamentarians initially had second thoughts about the reporting requirements we had adopted at the federal level. However, I am sure we will be able to be the first to say that being open and transparent about what we are paid in the way of salaries and expenses is not onerous. We have proven that it is not difficult to do. It has simply become the way we do business.

I am equally confident that if we were to survey provincial, territorial and municipal politicians who are subject to similar legislation, we would get the same reaction. Even if it took a bit of getting used to, I do not doubt that almost all would agree that being open with the public is not a chore. It is actually a good way to earn the confidence of people.

I also expect that many first nations leaders who already employ these practices—

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made Thursday, November 22, 2012, 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.

• (1755)

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 514*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy

Adams

Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
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
Obhrai
Oliver
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Raiitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Seeback
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 159

Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Baird
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
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
Miller
Norlock
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Plamondon
Quach	Rae
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel
Valerioté — 131	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

The Speaker: It being 5:56 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CANADA NATIONAL PARKS ACT

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC) moved that Bill C-370, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (St. Lawrence Islands National Park of Canada), be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise tonight to open third reading debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-370, an act to change the name of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park to Thousand Islands National Park.

I want to begin my comments by thanking members on both sides of the House for their participation in these debates and their support of the bill. I would also like to thank the witnesses who came to Ottawa on short notice last month to appear before the committee. For those who were unable to attend the committee meeting, I would point out that Kim St. Claire appeared on behalf of Parks Canada and explained how the bill would benefit the park. Don Ross, currently the executive director of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, noted how this name change was first proposed back in the 1970s when he was working for Parks Canada. Tom Russell, the executive director of the Thousand Islands Community Futures Development Corporation, spent his time explaining how businesses in the region use and benefit from the Thousand Islands name. He also noted the reliance of my region, where this park is located, on the hospitality sector. I appreciate the contribution of three of these folks to the discussion of the bill at committee. Their input was invaluable.

Among the issues discussed at committee were answers to questions that have been raised here about the bill. The first concern expressed was about the consultation. As Mr. Ross noted at committee, the consultation process for this name change began in the early 1970s but that it unfortunately did not proceed beyond the region itself. At the time, however, the consensus was that the park's name should be changed to Thousands Islands National Park.

My own consultation process on the bill dates back several years when I first heard from municipal councils in the region, as well as chambers of commerce and other concerned groups, that they would like to see the name change occur as quickly as possible.

Parks Canada also conducted a consultation that met with the same result from the public and other interested and concerned parties.

After the discussion that had taken place in the 1970s, many people in the region began referring to the park as the Thousand Islands National Park. There is no doubt that the name change is supported throughout the region.

The other issue that was raised was the cost involved in the name change. Ms. St. Claire addressed this in her remarks at committee. While a firm final figure has not been produced for acceptable reasons, Parks Canada put a ballpark figure of about \$100,000 for the change. This would be spent over an approximately 10-year period, which is one reason the exact cost is really hard to pinpoint. The other reason the cost is hard to nail down is that much of the changes would be accomplished as part of regular maintenance.

Private Members' Business

Let me explain what has to be done. Parks Canada would have to change a few signs on Highway 401 and on the Thousand Islands Parkway that direct people to the park. This would have to be undertaken almost immediately. These signs are slat signs, so only the actual name portion would have to be changed. It is possible that an inexpensive cover could be made for these signs until such a time as they require replacement with new signs.

Websites would have to be changed at a minimal cost. Letterhead, business cards and envelopes would be changed as they run out of current stock.

Sign boards at Parks Canada property would also be changed as part of the normal maintenance regime. In other words, as signs weather and wear out they would be replaced by new signs with the new name. This part of the change would actually be part of regular maintenance that would be undertaken with or without the name change, so although the name would be changed, the signs would in any case be replaced over a 10-year period. Ms. St. Claire indicated at committee that Parks Canada is actually looking forward to the exercise because it would give them an opportunity to take a sign inventory that is overdue at the park.

After all this time and all the discussion and efforts over the years to try to rename this park with a name better suited to its location, now is the time to act.

As I and others have mentioned in previous discussions here, the park is in a truly unique area of Canada. It is at the crossroads of the natural and cultural history of North America. Its natural assets have been recognized in the greater region that has the UNESCO world heritage designation. The park is located within the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve. It was a cultural crossroad as the North American continent was opened up by natives, adventurers, fur traders, explorers, settlers and merchants.

● (1800)

The St. Lawrence Islands National Park was established in 1904 as the first Canadian national park east of the Rocky Mountains. Located in the heart of the Thousand Islands area, it is an 80-kilometre wide extension of granite hilltops, which join the Canadian Shield of northern Ontario with the Adirondack Mountains in New York State. Glaciers retreated 10,000 years ago, scraping sediments and exposing the rounded knobs of an ancient mountain chain. When the St. Lawrence River flooded the area on its path to the Atlantic Ocean, over 1,000 hilltops became the Thousand Islands.

The area retains a rugged beauty. Plants and animals migrated to the area, encouraged by the moderating effects of the Great Lakes and the variety of micro-habitats, which were created by the rugged topography.

The islands form a land bridge from northwest to southeast across the St. Lawrence River, aiding movement of species through the area.

This narrow isthmus, known as the Frontenac Axis or Arch, is the vital link joining two important North American landforms, the Canadian Shield and the Adirondack Mountains, to form one ecosystem.

Although the waters of the Great Lakes can be a barrier to migrating flora and fauna, the St. Lawrence funnels the water into a narrow channel and the islands form stepping stones, shortening distances between the land masses.

The presence of the Great Lakes to the west has the effect of a heat sink, which moderates the climate in the area immediately surrounding the Thousand Islands. As a result, many plants and animals reach the northern or southern limits of their range in the Thousand Islands.

The river also funnelled people coming from the Atlantic to the interior of North America through the islands. Native people, explorers and settlers have left their mark on the region and the islands. Enough native artifacts have been located to prompt a mandatory search each time waterfront is developed.

Battles have taken place among the islands, especially during the War of 1812.

Explorers and writers have marvelled at their beauty and mystery.

The French actually named the area, Les Milles Isles, or the Thousand Islands, in the 1700s when French explorers travelled through the region. This was long before there were international boundaries. The islands themselves were named by the British navy.

As the region opened up to tourism in the late 1800s, people began to advocate for a park to protect and preserve some of the islands. The park began in 1904 with a small piece of waterfront property at Mallorytown Landing. Nine federally-owned islands in the St. Lawrence River added to the attraction and recreation facilities were installed.

Over the years, islands and land parcels were annexed. Today, the park comprises more than 20 islands and about 90 islets scattered between the Main Duck Island, which is south of Kingston and Lake Ontario, and Brockville, Ontario. It includes mainland properties at Mallorytown Landing, Landon Bay, Jones Creek and the Larue Mills Creek.

Our national parks represent Canada and showcase the best of what we have to offer. This park is an excellent example of that.

Parks are protected so they can be enjoyed by visitors today and into the future.

Parks Canada's offerings make the federal government Canada's largest provider of natural and cultural tourism products. Its destinations, such as national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas, form the cornerstones of the Canadian tourism industry.

Tourism represents as a significant economic opportunity for Canada. In 2010 the tourism sector contributed \$29.7 billion to the Canadian economy and employed 617,300 Canadians. In my riding alone, over 6,000 people are employed in the visitor services industry.

Our national parks, and this one especially in my great riding of Leeds—Grenville, offer important economic possibilities for the province of Ontario and for Canada.

The Thousand Islands is known throughout the world as a tourism destination. Every year millions of tourists flock to the region, but very few people know that there is a national park located in the heart of those islands.

This park is the closest national park to the city of Ottawa. Even with the creation of Rouge National Urban Park, Thousand Islands national park will remain one of the closest national parks to the Toronto region. However, it remains one of our best kept secrets.

● (1805)

It is time for us to offer new possibilities for this majestic national park and something as simple as changing its name will dramatically alter how Parks Canada engages and attracts members of the public.

For over 100 years, tourism has played a prominent role in the Thousand Islands community, supporting family-owned businesses from generation to generation.

St. Lawrence Islands National Park has an annual budget in excess of \$1.5 million. While some of this revenue is self-generated, a majority comes from the Canadian taxpayer.

When Parks Canada has publicly stated that it is trying to encourage new Canadians, younger Canadians and urban Canadians to visit national parks, it does not make sense for Parks Canada to work outside the regional brand of Thousand Islands.

That brand is known throughout the world, yet in a region where other private tourism providers take advantage of the strong, recognized and powerful world-famous Thousand Islands brand name in using the term “St. Lawrence Islands”, Parks Canada is not talking in the same language as other Thousand Islands tourism operators.

If one were a traveller, one would find it difficult to distinguish between the offerings of the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, Parks of the St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence Islands National Park. Two of the three organizations named have many sites outside the immediate Thousand Islands area and are not interchangeable with the national park. As well, they have differing mandates.

As the government, it is our role to help remove barriers that limit opportunities for Canadians to become more engaged with our treasured natural places. We should be doing all we can to help provide opportunities to showcase what Parks Canada has to offer. Placing Thousand Islands national park on the map is a small but significant step that will help enhance public awareness of this incredible park.

A name change presents an opportunity to renew Canadians' passion and support for our country's important natural spaces. A name change would help ensure that this national park finds a place in the consciousness of Canadians and that future generations are inspired by and support this long established protected treasure.

Economically, a name change to Thousand Islands national park would align our public offering with those of other regional tourism providers. This would help initiate sustainable, expandable growth generating activities and relationships. We are creating a legacy that says lasting improvements can be made by government.

Private Members' Business

Parks Canada will be able to expand its reach and impact by taking advantage of the existing regional brand. We heard this from Ms. St. Claire during the committee meeting.

National parks have been renamed in the past and in both of these instances the new names better reflect the region in which they are situated. This is what I am trying to accomplish with the bill.

Bill C-370 is an easy bill for all members of the House to support because we will be changing the name from St. Lawrence Islands National Park to a name that better reflects the local region. It is a name that is already used by regional residents and existing park visitors. It is a name that will help Parks Canada position the wonderful landscapes and features of the park in the psyche of Canadians. It is a name that will immediately improve local, national and international recognition of the park. It is a name that will facilitate better interactions with other regional tour operations and tourism initiatives, improving local economic opportunity. It is a name that simply makes sense.

Thousand Islands national park fits the region, it fits tradition and it fits the future. Thousand Islands national park is the right name for the right park and it is about time.

* * *

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 66 (2), I would like to designate Thursday, November 29, 2012, for the continuation of debate on the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Health.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADA NATIONAL PARKS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-370, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (St. Lawrence Islands National Park of Canada), be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have another opportunity to speak to Bill C-370, an act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (St. Lawrence Islands National Park of Canada).

St. Lawrence Islands National Park is located in the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River within the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, as we heard from our colleague, the member for Leeds—Grenville. It is a beautiful region of our country and is known as being one of the areas of highest biodiversity in Canada. It also has historical significance as it was the first national park established in Canada east of the Rocky Mountains.

Private Members' Business

Furthermore, the park is part of an established UNESCO biosphere reserve. Canadians from across the country, as well as tourists from around the globe come to the park to enjoy its hiking trails, interpretative programs, exhibits and family activities. In committee, we heard from a representative from Parks Canada who I feel provided a beautiful description of this national treasure and its surrounding areas. She said:

Quite simply, the Thousand Islands is a place where nature and culture intermingle. Majestic castles and historic summer homes stand in contrast with rugged islands of granite and pine that are home to lumbering turtles, soaring eagles, and countless other species.

It sounds like a wonderful piece of our Canadian landscape. In Canada we are very fortunate to have our national parks. There is no doubt of their importance to Canadians and that they are an asset to our country.

I know in Scarborough—Rouge River, in my home community, the Rouge Park is certainly a valued treasure among my constituents and the residents of the greater Toronto area. We call it our unknown gem in Toronto. The people in my riding were calling for the creation of Rouge National Park for many years. The announcement in the throne speech that Rouge Park will be designated the first urban national park was a huge victory for the people of this area and a testament to members of our community who worked for over a quarter century to see their dreams for Rouge National Park become a reality.

However, Scarborough residents and residents of the GTA are anxious for a plan to establish this park as part of the national parks system for Canadians and tourists to explore, while preserving and continuing the conservation efforts, as well as respecting the need to maintain the ecological integrity of our local natural gem. Finally, the people involved would like dedicated stable funding to see this dream realized, ensuring the preservation and conservation of the ecosystem to ensure future generations will have the area to enjoy.

When Bill C-370 was first presented, we felt that it needed more dialogue, and it was examined with due diligence. I must mention at this point that this is why we voted against the bill at the earlier stages, because we wanted to ensure that due diligence of every part that needed to be done was done. Our main concern with the bill was fiscal responsibility.

Our support for legislation such as this relies on due diligence in order to protect taxpayer dollars. We had just been delivered a budget where Parks Canada was dealt a funding cut of \$29.2 million by 2015. There was a lack of costing information on this matter, which is why we chose to oppose it earlier.

Our other concern was whether or not the community was consulted on this issue. Fortunately, many of our concerns and questions were answered when we were at committee. I thank all of the members of the local community, as well as my hon. colleague from Leeds—Grenville for providing that opportunity to be able to ask and have those questions answered.

In committee we learned that the costs of changing the name are around \$138,000, disbursed over a 10-year period. Most of the costs involved are related to redoing the physical signage within the park. There would be an attempt to keep the costs low, as Parks Canada would immediately replace four large signage panels on the park's

mainland properties but would then change the island signage over a 10-year plan.

Some of these costs would be incurred with or without the name change due to regular maintenance and upkeep costs. The St. Lawrence Islands National Park already prints its promotional materials and pamphlets on an annual basis, which are updated prior to printing. Changes to the website will simply involve updating the text and will not incur further costs.

• (1815)

We learned more about the economic benefit of this name change. While there is certainly a cost associated with the renaming of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park to the Thousand Islands National Park, there are potential economic gains that changing the name of the park could actually produce for the local community.

The park is located in an area that is properly known within Canada and worldwide as the Thousand Islands region. Tourism and visitor services are an important part of the economic development of the region surrounding the park. Visitor services are increasingly important as the economic mix of the region has changed from manufacturing, and visitors come from around the world to visit the Thousand Islands.

In a region where private tourism providers build their businesses by taking advantage of the recognized and powerful Thousand Islands brand name, the name St. Lawrence Islands National Park is not really helping matters or their pocketbooks. It promotes confusion and can lead to missed economic opportunities for the local businesses in the community. Renaming the park would allow it to be more easily identified by potential tourists and visitors.

As Thousand Islands is a recognized brand, changing the name of the park could open opportunities to further attract and engage local and international visitors as well as furthering business opportunities. As well, improved branding of the park would aid in the continued development of the tourism industry.

It was also extremely encouraging to hear from community members and the local business association and about the local consultations that took place.

Rouge Park is being referred to as the people's park. I have been consulting my constituents, as has Parks Canada, to ensure that this park incorporates their ideas for a park in their neighbourhood, which they would visit and enjoy. Moving forward, we are working hard to make sure the voices of community members are heard in the consultation process. Community consultation is a very important step, and I believe it is imperative for a change like this. I agree it is important that the Thousand Islands community gains the same recognition in promoting its national park's and community's interest.

As far back as 1978, a St. Lawrence Islands National Park advisory committee has been recommending changing the park's name. Parks Canada supports the name change, as do local businesses, business councils and all of the municipalities involved.

Private Members' Business

The changing of the name to the Thousand Islands National Park was endorsed by many of the local municipalities and they passed resolutions supporting the bill. The majority of Thousand Islanders agree with making this change, as locally the park is already known as the Thousand Islands National Park.

It is for these reasons that we will be supporting the bill at third reading. Our country has some of the most beautiful national parks in the world. Their benefits to our country are absolutely invaluable. As Canadians, we treasure their ecosystems and biodiversity, and we must ensure that our government continues to protect and preserve their beauty and our environment.

We must make this commitment now so that future generations can appreciate and enjoy all that our national parks have to offer.

● (1820)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe memories are what national parks are all about. I certainly have fond memories of vacations with my parents and brothers. People who approached me when the subject of this bill came up told me stories of their vacations, of sitting on the dock with their father, and the memories they treasure. That is one of the reasons we treasure our parks. There are other reasons that we treasure our parks. They are places to preserve a bit of nature, to preserve biodiversity.

This park in question, which is soon to be known as the Thousand Islands National Park, is no exception. In my earlier speech, I mentioned that in my home riding of Kingston and the Islands, in which a small part of this park finds itself, one day we discovered a wild turkey sitting in my mother's backyard. I did not know that wild turkeys live in Canada but they do, because there are parts of Canada where this biodiversity is preserved.

Why are we considering this bill right now? The reason is that we see an opportunity, in the midst of some cuts to funding for Parks Canada. I wish to acknowledge that my colleague from Leeds—Grenville is very cognizant of the need to look carefully at these cuts and maybe to scale back on some of them to ensure we preserve the benefits of our parks for everybody to enjoy, and for tourists to come to Canada to enjoy. He has been working hard to ensure we are very careful about the cuts we make to Parks Canada. However, it is also an opportunity to look at how we could move forward, how we could encourage tourism to a park that has a lot of benefits, not only to my riding and my hon. colleague's riding, but to the whole country's economy.

We are considering changing the name to Thousands Islands National Park because Thousand Islands is a name that is recognized far and wide. I remember when we, as a family, vacationed around the country. In the United States, when we explained to people where we lived, we would say we lived right by the Thousand Islands. This is a name that has a lot of recognition around the world, and it is a name we know is very appropriate for this park. It is situated right in the Thousand Islands region. It is a name that is so ingrained in people's minds that they often refer to my riding as Kingston and the Thousand Islands, not by its correct name of Kingston and the Islands.

In committee, we have dealt with the issue of cost and, as my hon. colleague from Leeds—Grenville mentioned, the costs are roughly

known. There is a good estimate of what the costs would be, and a lot of that would simply be incurred anyway due to regular maintenance. That has come out in committee, and I am glad we have had the chance to cover that issue.

It would be a marketing opportunity and an opportunity to ensure that all of the resources in our region are used to maximize the economic benefit of our natural environment and the resources we have. This initiative would encourage tourism to the area, support the creation and maintenance of employment in the area, and it would have a very natural economic benefit that we want to promote. I think the member knew about all of this. When I heard of this bill, I phoned some acquaintances who knew about the park and the region, some of them being previous members of the staff.

● (1825)

We confirmed that all the changes made sense and that all stakeholders in the region wanted this change, were aware of the benefits and had an idea of what it would cost and that the cost-benefit analysis was definitely positive.

Now everything has been looked at by the committee, and I am glad that my colleague in the NDP has done her due diligence and is satisfied with the cost of this bill and its benefits and will be supporting this bill at third reading. We can all agree that it would be the right thing to move ahead with this change and rename this park the Thousand Islands National Park, so that people can bring their families to vacation in the Thousand Islands National Park and create memories that they and their kids will carry with them for the rest of their lives, memories we cherish and are part of why national parks are so important to us and our country.

I ask all members of the House to support this bill at third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate. Seeing no one, I ask the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville for his right of reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the members for Scarborough—Rouge River and Kingston and the Islands for their presentations today. I am glad they have had the opportunity to do their due diligence and ensure that everything is being done the way it should be. I appreciate that they wanted to go through that process.

I would like to thank the people who came to the committee, Tom Russell, Don Ross and Ms. Kim St. Claire from Parks Canada. It was a good opportunity for the committee to learn exactly what the community felt about this first-hand from those who have been intimately involved in economic development, in the parks and the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve in the region.

I am very happy that there is all-party support for this bill. It has been working its way through the legislative process for quite some time. I expect we will vote on this tomorrow and send it off to the Senate. After it is dealt with there, hopefully in a positive way, we can look forward to unveiling the new sign with the new name, Thousand Islands National Park.

● (1830)

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

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Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 28, 2012, 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.

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again to address the ongoing negotiations with the European Union regarding the comprehensive economic and trade agreement known as CETA. This intervention is extremely timely in light of a leaked communiqué out of Europe this week that illustrates the lack of transparency and overly ideological approach that the Conservative government has taken to the CETA negotiations.

First of all, the memorandum illustrates that the European negotiators are being much more consultative and transparent than the Canadian Conservative government. They are providing their parliamentary trade committee with regular updates, allowing for input from European parliamentarians from all political stripes. This is not the case in Canada. The Conservative government will not answer questions in the House directly. It very rarely updates the trade committee on the CETA negotiations and it does not consult broadly with Canadians.

Why will the government not allow scrutiny of the process? Perhaps the leaked documents shed light on that question as well. These leaked communiqués from the European Commission expose the Conservatives' incompetence in negotiating and validate the concerns of Canadians with regard to CETA.

For instance, the government has been talking the talk when it comes to defending the supply management system in Canada. However the European's internal communiqué confirms that Canada has already agreed to grant new market access to supply managed goods in the form of tariff rate quotas. This is not defending supply management in Canada. It is unacceptable to the thousands of farmers in Canada who rely on that system to ensure stability. This

type of concession sends shock waves through the supply managed sectors, which see this as a very slippery slope that could be further eroded in future deals such as the TPP.

With regard to intellectual property, the leaked communiqué illustrates that the government is very much considering caving to the pressures of the European pharmaceutical companies. These are concessions that will increase the cost of prescriptions in Canada. Canadians, including provincial governments, employers and other drug providers, have been expressing concerns about this for years now but the Conservatives dismissed these concerns as myth. We now see that the IP changes are on the table and they are decisions that will be "taken at the highest political level". I ask the minister and the Prime Minister what their decision is. Has it been decided that Canadians will have to pay more for their medications or not?

With regard to public procurement, the EU acknowledges that this is "the most ambitious and comprehensive offer Canada and its provinces have made to any partner, including the U.S." Our offer to the EU even outreaches commitments that currently exist between provinces in Canada, but Europe still wants more. On public urban transport, Europe is asking us to provide full access and in particular to eliminate all local content requirements for EU operators. It is demanding that provincial and regional development clauses be either eliminated or redrafted.

There is much to discuss with regard to CETA, more than I have time for here, but I must address the issue of imbalance. We have just seen the example of the FIPA with China where Canada signed a deal that was terribly imbalanced, with Canada at the losing end.

Again, in the documents leaked from the EU, Canada may be about to sign another imbalanced agreement. The commission acknowledges that we are only asking that the EU enshrine existing liberalization, while the Europeans are asking us to substantially open our markets. On services and investment, the Europeans claim Canada has opened its markets fully while it has maintained complete policy space for the future. Once again we see the government pushing forward in a reckless manner, selling out Canadian interests and decrying any opposition to its agenda as anti-trade.

On this side of the House we are pro-trade and we await the final draft of the CETA to weigh it in its entirety and see if it is of net benefit to Canada. However, every time we see a leaked draft or document, we see a government that is not putting Canada's interests first.

Will the government heed the advice of Canadians and address the imbalance before it presents us with a final agreement, and will it get consultation from Canadians and let us see the final draft before it is signed off in Europe?

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1835)

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 do not know where to begin. I have heard some rants and some misinformation in the House before, but I do not think I have heard anything that is ever going to beat that. For the absolute unmitigated gall of the hon. member to say that was a pro-trade speech is absolutely mind-boggling.

First of all, let us deal with a couple of issues. The hon. member wants to talk about a leaked memorandum. A leaked memorandum is exactly what it is. That is something that is deliberately leaked by an another party to try to force something else to happen in negotiations. That is what leaked memoranda do, and the hon. member played into that very nicely. He picked it up and did a great job for the European Union.

That the European committee is better briefed than our committee is absolute nonsense. We have met a couple of times with the European trade committee. The first thing we learned is that we were much better briefed than they were in these negotiations. The words “updated and consulted broadly” are absolute nonsense.

Here is the deal. Canada is a trading nation. We are looking at CETA, the comprehensive economic trade agreement to increase trade with the European Union by about \$12 billion and about 80,000 jobs, the equivalent of about \$1,000 per household in Canada. This is a good agreement for Canada. Our future is tied to trade.

The hon. member actually asked for this late show. It is kind of like a light show, I guess. It is coming up to Christmas, and all of us have the Christmas spirit and a certain belief in make-believe, and the hon. member brings that out well. However, we have to talk about facts when we stand in the House.

The fact is very simple. We have negotiated this in the best interests of Canadians. We continue to brief the provinces on a regular basis. We brief the municipalities. It is the first time ever that they have had briefings from a federal minister for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

The reality is that this series of negotiations are to benefit Canada. We will bring this to a conclusion at some point, whether it is this year or early in 2013, and at the end of the day, Canadians will be better off because of it.

As far as public procurement, the offer on public procurement is ambitious. The provinces have signed on to it. The provinces and municipalities have to sign on for public procurement. The hon. member knows that.

With regard to the idea that somehow we are going to cost Canadians more money on pharmaceuticals, this is still being negotiated. The hon. member needs to calm down, wait until the negotiations are over, and then he can stand in the House and speak with some surety. Until then, we will continue briefing the provinces and the municipalities, but we will negotiate the way that every agreement is negotiated. When the final agreement is ready, we will bring it forward.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, the government keeps talking about mythical numbers and telling us how great this agreement is that they do not have the courage to show us. Let us address transparency. In the section of the leaked memorandum between the EU Commission and the trade committee that addresses public utilities, the commission refers to concessions that Canada has made “reluctantly”. The concessions have to do with the fact that the EU is maintaining various reservations for public utilities, whereas Canada is putting those on the table.

The document says that Canada has asked the EU member states to make a change to the language “which would help in the presentation to our provinces”. It sounds an awful lot like Canada is asking the EU to help it create spin to more easily sell a raw deal to our provinces. The government has shown a lack of respect to the provinces before, but this is outrageous. The government has long insisted that it wants this deal done before the end of the year, and with that fast approaching it is evident we are far from a fair deal, a balanced deal, for Canada.

Will the government commit to listening to Canadians and keep working at this until we have a deal that is good for our economy and all Canadians, and that is balanced between the two economies?

• (1840)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I think I have had a bit of an epiphany. I listened closely to the hon. member's language, and really what we are talking about is the fact that the anti-trade party, or the no-trade party, is not at the table. If the New Democrats were at the table, we would not have this discussion because there would not be any negotiations.

The reality is that this goes way back to the days when the NDP vehemently opposed NAFTA. We are talking about 1988 vintage language that is coming from the hon. member. Today, the last time I checked, it is 2012. That is a long way from 1988 and the original free trade agreement with the United States. Surely, the NDP members have learned in the interim that trade is good for Canada, good for businesses and it is what drives this country.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise again on border issues, as I have many times.

I first want to thank a constituent of mine, Richard Ruston, from the People First movement, who gave me this nice lapel pin for those working on behalf of and advocating for persons with intellectual disabilities.

To move to the subject matter at hand, I rose in the chamber in September to talk about the issues at the Canada Border Services Agency and a memorandum that was issued to CBSA border officials to stand down when they find drugs outbound to the U.S. at the border.

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It is a very serious issue because as we have seen over a period of time, there have been budget cuts to border services. In fact, there have been 325 positions identified for cuts where the government has asked the union for 325 volunteers to abandon their posts and retire or leave. What is going to happen is that there will not be the people or the capacity to actually replace those jobs. Those jobs are now gone, so there will be fewer people serving at the border, the men and women who do an able job in the circumstances. Most recently we had a tragic shooting of an officer, who was actually from the London area. We are saddened to see that situation. It is a very serious job.

The government has removed the detector dog program, which was very effective in catching criminals who were trying to bring in drugs, guns and other types of contraband.

This memorandum is a slap in the face of our officers. It comes about because of cuts to the number of agents and intel, which is not properly gathered any more. The government now wants to allow this to just go to the United States.

The problem with this strategy is that a couple of major issues are involved, which the government needs to account for. Often, these drugs go into the United States and become cash, other hard drugs, or guns or other contraband that criminals then attempt to return to Canada. Therefore, our prevention strategy of working to find drugs exiting the country has actually lowered crime in Canada because it prevents criminal organizations and others from getting resources they use for other criminal activity.

I have talked to a number of my American counterparts, be they elected officials or business or social interests, who are very concerned about Canadian officials removing this preventive strategy. They are very concerned about their people being exposed to additional Canadian manufactured drugs, or drugs that have come into Canada and then gone elsewhere into the United States, affecting their livelihood and wellbeing. It creates addiction problems, social problems, workplace problems and increases in organized crime as well.

It is a black eye for our country to abandon our number one trading partner by no longer attempting to find that type of contraband and preventing it from going over the border. We can do better.

• (1845)

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, first, our thoughts and prayers go out to the family of the slain border officer from southern Ontario. The fact that we have lost an officer weighs heavily on everyone who works in border services.

I would like to put on the record that the hon. member had the opportunity a year or so ago when we armed border services officers to support that bill, but he voted against it.

My hon. colleague is stating that it is becoming easier for criminals to smuggle contraband to and from Canada. The NDP claim that border security has been cut, which is patently false. There have been no cuts to front line CBSA officers. In fact, we have increased CBSA officers by 26%.

The member for Windsor West stated that the minister ordered CBSA to stop searching for drugs and guns headed to the U.S. border. Nothing could be further from the truth. Criminals are always finding new ways to avoid detection. It is necessary for the Canadian Border Services Agency to review and update its enforcement policies and priorities to meet these challenges and to make maximum use of the tools readily available.

The responsibility for controlling contraband does not solely rest with border services officers. They are only part of a vast network of CBSA intelligence officers, criminal investigators and other law enforcement partners who work together to identify criminals who would break Canadian and international law.

It needs to be said that organized crime and criminal behaviour requires action on multiple fronts. For example, Canadian law enforcement partners are taking action to cut off drugs at the source by shutting down production. The CBSA is also an active participant in the national anti-drug strategy in which this government has invested over \$100 million for federal drug enforcement activities.

The CBSA both produces and receives information and intelligence that it uses to make risk assessments to better target its efforts. I am sure that member opposite would agree that it is a much better use of resources to have our border services officers focusing their examinations of outbound cargo based on intelligence lookouts rather than looking for that proverbial needle in the haystack.

The CBSA engages in a number of outbound enforcement activities in all modes of service, be it postal, highway, air or marine, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, that is unbelievable. First, I will clear up something that shows just how misinformed the member is on this subject and probably many others.

The member said that I voted against arming the border guards. In fact, it was a campaign that I worked on with Stockwell Day in voting for that. I was awarded a CBSA jacket along with Stockwell Day and the member for Windsor—Tecumseh. There is actually a public record of that. It was the NDP that approached the Conservatives to get that done. If the member does not even know that, what else does he not know?

I am amazed. A memorandum was issued about this action from the department. The evidence is there and it is clear.

I hope the member gets up and apologizes and stops making things up in this chamber. What else are you making up?

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

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I would be more than happy to address my comments through the Chair.

If I was incorrect on the hon. member's vote, then I certainly do apologize. I am glad that at least one member of the NDP recognized the importance of arming the border services officers.

The hon. member can take high dudgeon that somehow his actions in this place were misrepresented. However, I have watched the official opposition members every day vote against government policy. I watched them reverse themselves on gun control and trade. I have watched them attempt to deliberately mislead the public. It is a not a pretty sight.

The hon. member can be upset. If I was mistaken, I absolutely correct that and the record can therefore be read.

Here is the deal. CBSA handles over 13 million commercial releases a year, whether those shipments are coming into or leaving Canada. CBSA's enforcement, intelligence and targeting efforts are

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focused on illegal activities such as trafficking in child pornography, weapons and narcotics. That is a big job and CBSA does it well.

● (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice had been given. Therefore, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:51 p.m.)

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