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—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 4, 2013

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

DISABILITY TAX CREDIT PROMOTERS RESTRICTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-462, An Act restricting the fees charged by promoters of the disability tax credit and making consequential amendments to the Tax Court of Canada Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-462. When I thought about what I wanted to say concerning this bill, I thought about what a great country we live in, where people can get together across Canada and offer support to those who are less fortunate, those who may lack some of the things that the rest of us sometimes take for granted, and that we can offer financial aid to help make more equitable some of the accidental inequities we have in our society.

One of these things is the disability tax credit. This a credit that allows people with certain long-term disabilities to get some funds to compensate for the fact that a lot of things become more expensive and may require an outlay of funds, if a person has a long-term disability. This tax credit is a non-refundable tax credit, and so for the time being a person has to have a taxable income to claim this tax credit. However, I hope that in the future the House would consider making such a tax credit, and a number of other tax credits, refundable so they are available to help members of our community whom we want to help, but who may not have taxable income against which they could claim a credit.

The Liberal Party and I support this bill in principle and we support moving it to committee to look at some of the details, and it is important to look at the details.

This bill proposes to put some limits on the amount that preparers or promoters could charge individuals to help them make a claim for a disability tax credit. It proposes to set some maximums, according to an as yet undetermined formula, and to create some new offences and penalties in cases where these maximums are exceeded. There is

a good reason for that. We have seen reports that rather large amounts have been charged to people seeking the disability tax credit by promoters, preparers who are in the business of helping people make their claims. One of the reasons their fees are charged is that under the legislation it is possible to go back 10 years and claim retroactive amounts for the disability tax credit, so to some extent there may be complications. For that reason there is a small industry that has grown up to explain the disability tax credit to people and to help do the paperwork to file the documents that are needed to claim the credit.

Why is it that the House should get involved at the committee stage to perhaps put some more detail on these maximums? The reason is that we should be looking at a number of things. First, whenever we feel we need to create a new offence and some new penalties, we should think about whether there is another way to help achieve what we want to achieve and not solely rely on creating new penalties and new offences. For example, in this case it may be possible at committee stage that we might decide there are ways to simplify either the tax code or the forms one needs to file to reduce the chance that people need to hire somebody to help them prepare these applications, and so to reduce the chance that the people who need the disability tax credit would have to pay 10% or 20% or sometimes more to these preparers. That is something we should look at, because if there is a way to avoid making a new crime and new punishment, we should be following that.

The other thing one might want to consider is something I will illustrate with an example. This is another thing that should be considered in committee. When I do my taxes, I use an Excel spreadsheet, and most of the time my tax situation is the same from year to year. The first year I set up the Excel spreadsheet, it took a long time to program it and put all the formulas in the cells, but in succeeding years it is much easier. It takes very little time for me to put together my tax return and do all the calculations. Sometimes the laws change and I have to adjust the spreadsheet, and sometimes my personal situation changes, as it did last year, and I have to spend more time changing the spreadsheet and looking at what the rules are.

In the case where, for example, somebody is claiming the disability tax credit, there is a lot of work to do in the first year. People have to look at how this tax credit interacts with all the other parts of their tax situation. In the first tax year, there is a lot of work to be done. We might consider giving more leeway in the first year of a claim for the disability tax credit and then maybe tighter limits in succeeding years when there will be less work to be done. These are the sorts of details that can be considered in committee.

Private Members' Business

In the proposed bill, there is no definite dollar amount set for the limits. For example, there could be a certain number of dollars for the first few hundred dollars of claims under the disability tax credit and then a percentage for anything above that amount. We need to figure out the right place to put the boundary. On the one hand, we know there is quite a bit of work to be done and people have to know what they are doing. They need to be trained and able to do a good job filing claims for tax credits. On the other hand, we want to discourage people from charging too much or discourage people from not bothering to claim the tax credit because it costs too much to hire someone.

We need to hear from witnesses in committee and look at where that boundary should lie and what is a fair limit to put on the amount tax preparers can charge for preparing a disability tax credit application. We have to be careful not to place a limit that is too low. We might think we have to make sure preparers do not get too much money, but it is also possible to place a limit that is too low, which would discourage people from claiming it because they may not find a tax preparer willing to do the work for the money. We all agree that when people have skills, experience and ability, they deserve to be paid for the high-quality professional work they do. We should be very careful about these sorts of unintended consequences, and that is another reason the committee should hear witnesses on this and not simply rely on the Governor in Council to set all of these numbers. It would be a good idea to hear testimony from witnesses and perhaps make some amendments to the bill in committee.

My colleague who introduced this bill decided to bring forward a bill in the House based on her experience with constituents who are worried about the high fees they might have to pay to claim something they need to help compensate them for their disabilities. I want to congratulate my colleague for doing that, for listening to her constituents and bringing their concerns in the form of a bill to the House of Commons.

• (1110)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has made a clear commitment to supporting hard-working Canadian families through various tax credits and income support programs, so that they are there in the times of sickness or disability. Government members recognize that Canadians sometimes have a difficult time making ends meet. We understand there may be occasions when they need others to look out for them, to prevent an already difficult situation from becoming worse. When times are tough, we need to support each other.

I am proud to stand beside my hon. colleague from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and her private member's bill, which will make sure we do exactly that. Bill C-462 introduces new measures that would protect the rights of individual Canadians with disabilities and their families to fair tax treatment.

One of the most important programs to help Canadians with disabilities is the disability tax credit, also known as the DTC. However, those applying for the credit are not always treated justly by some business operators who seem more intent on generating inappropriate profits for themselves than actually ensuring their clients' needs are met.

There have been numerous cases brought to our attention in which promoters have charged up to 40% of the amount of a person's income tax credit, often amounting to thousands of dollars for something that is very simple to do. These businesses are generally just completing part A of the DTC application, a straightforward process that usually takes very little time.

In fact, in my clinic, with many cerebral palsy patients, or in my riding, with a number of disabled constituents, these individuals have mentioned to me that they are concerned about this inappropriate treatment and that they are in need of help.

If for any reason someone with a disability or a family member providing care needs help, the Canada Revenue Agency has agents who specialize in the disability tax credit. They are just a phone call away, and they can assist both taxpayers and qualified practitioners by providing information on both the criteria and application process. Most offices of members of Parliament also provide help to constituents who are in need assistance on this file.

Despite this free and helpful service, many Canadians are turning to promoters who have sprung up in growing numbers in the past number of years. While I certainly would not suggest this applies to all promoters, some of them are known to target and aggressively pursue individuals who are eligible for the disability tax credit, especially if they may be eligible for refunds retroactively up to 10 years. I know this personally from my experience in my clinic, hearing from parents of their challenges in dealing with these aggressive promoters.

Unfortunately, once they turn their paperwork over to these individuals, people with disabilities often end up with as little as 60% of the money to which they are entitled. That is like paying 40% interest on a bank loan or credit card, something that is totally unacceptable, and should be unacceptable and deplorable in the mindset of parliamentarians.

The contingency fees charged by some businesses far outweigh the value of the services they are performing. There is a lot of money involved, money that Canadians with disabilities actually need. In 2012, the federal tax savings for someone eligible for the DTC will be up to \$1,132 for an adult and \$1,792 for a child under the age of 18 or their family member supporting them. Since these credits can be claimed retroactively going back over a decade, potentially 10 times these amounts are available to eligible recipients.

That is why we must act. That is why the bill put forward by the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is essential. We have to ensure that promoters do not take advantage of these Canadians with disabilities and recover many of the extra costs they incur for their health conditions.

Private Members' Business

Let me remind the House about the types of situations we are talking about. The disability tax credit provides a tax reduction to people with severe, prolonged impairment in physical or mental function whose ability to pay tax is limited by their disability-related expenses. The disability should be severe enough to restrict them in their basic activities of daily living or cause a person to take an inordinate amount of time to perform these duties, even if they have appropriate therapy, medication or devices. The restrictions must be expected to last for a continuous period of 12 months or may be present at least 90% of the time. People may also be eligible under the cumulative effect of two or more restrictions, which in combination are present 90% of the time.

Such individuals are already facing serious challenges, so whether it be a child with cerebral palsy who may be a full-time wheelchair user or someone with a spinal cord injury, these are individuals who need this support. The last thing they need is to have some unscrupulous promoter take advantage of them and take a portion of their tax refund, which is owed to them, which they need to make sure they are sustaining their quality of life.

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians with disabilities and family members who care for them count on the disability tax credit to help improve their standard of living and their quality of life.

• (1115)

I applaud the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for introducing this essential legislation. The act is an important step forward in creating fair treatment of all Canadian taxpayers. Thanks to her commitment in protecting the interests of her constituents and Canadian families across the country who either have a child with a disability or have a disability themselves, her actions for Canadians will make sure they receive the payment at a reasonable rate if they choose to have a promoter help them complete their DTC application. That is because Bill C-462 would restrict the fees that are charged or accepted by businesses that request a determination of DTC eligibility for Canadians with disabilities.

Public consultations would be conducted to determine an appropriate maximum fee that reflects the value of the services being provided. Once an appropriate fee has been determined, the bill would prohibit charging more than that established amount. The legislation would also require these promoters to notify CRA if more than the maximum fee were charged. A minimum penalty of \$1,000 would apply when that limit is exceeded. A promoter failing to notify the CRA when an excessive fee is charged would be guilty of an offence and liable to a \$1,000 to \$25,000 as a fine.

Finally, the bill would benefit caregivers of people with severe disabilities. It would decrease the cost of applying for the DTC, freeing up more funds so they can take care of the individuals they care about.

I want to underline that the legislation is not aimed at legitimate tax preparers. We have no interest in interfering with regular business practices. We simply want to ensure that the companies completing DTC applications charge rates that represent the value of the service they actually provide and that the funds from the DTC end up in the hands of the people who need it, individuals with disabilities and their families.

This legislation is yet another manifestation of our determination to fully support individuals who have disabilities. We know that initiatives like the disability tax credit are vitally important in assisting Canadians with disabilities. Tax credits are key to our economic action plan, a plan for jobs, growth and prosperity, and making sure the quality of life of Canadians, particularly those persons with disabilities and their families, are well supported.

I call on all parties in the House to lend their support to Bill C-462. Support the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and her excellent legislation that will create a fairness in the tax structure and also make sure that individuals with disabilities, and their families, are supported as they should be.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-462, Disability Tax Credit Promoters Restrictions Act.

This bill was introduced by my hon. colleague from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, with whom I sit on the defence committee. Thus, I was pleased to read her bill very carefully.

The purpose of Bill C-462 is to restrict the amount of fees that can be charged by promoters of the disability tax credit. I would like to back up a little bit. This bill is being introduced because the Liberal government changed the eligibility criteria for these tax credits in 2005. That change made retroactive payments possible for up to 10 years.

For those who do not know, I would add that thousands of people with disabilities in our community could be eligible for this tax credit, which generates a significant tax refund from the Canada Revenue Agency. I urge everyone who has a disability to see if they qualify for this tax credit. They could be eligible for up to \$1,380 a year, which can be claimed retroactively for up to 10 years. Given that the government introduced retroactive payments, this can mean significant sums of money for people with disabilities.

This explains why some people have become promoters of this tax credit. People have begun offering their services to help eligible people apply for and receive their refund. Some of these promoters do a very good job, but others have unfortunately abused their position. For instance, some promoters charge exorbitant fees, sometimes as much as 30% of the refund received.

This sort of thing defeats the purpose of the tax credit. When the government creates a tax credit for people with disabilities, it wants those people to benefit from it, not the promoters. Furthermore, charging such high fees is an abuse of persons with disabilities, because it deprives them of part of the money that is rightfully theirs, which they need. Living with a disability can be difficult financially. That money should go primarily to them.

Private Members' Business

So, this bill limits the amount of fees that can be charged by promoters of the disability tax credit, in order to prevent these kinds of excesses. I am sure that the member, like me, has nothing against promoters in general, but rather she simply wants to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to the tax credit and that they can find the support they need to obtain their refund, while safeguarding against potential abuse.

We know that promoters play a key role in helping people with disabilities get the government services and financial assistance they cannot get elsewhere. The Income Tax Act is fairly complicated, so it is easy to understand why someone might want help from a third party.

I am not an expert on the disability tax credit, but I am concerned that the bill, as written, may not include all of the details and provisions needed to ensure effective implementation. Still, it should go to committee so that we can study and improve it. After we study it in committee, we will be able to amend and clarify it so that we end up with a good bill that will protect people from those who would take advantage of them.

As it stands, Bill C-462 prohibits promoters from charging fees that exceed the maximum fee set by the Governor in Council. I wonder if it might be best to specify how and when those fees will be set and how the public will be informed. Those are details we can hammer out in committee. I imagine that my colleague has already started thinking about those details and will share her thoughts with the committee.

• (1125)

Any promoter who is convicted of charging more than the maximum fee or who makes false entries in a notification to the minister could end up with a criminal record. Here again, thorough study will ensure that we do not end up with the unintended consequence of saddling too many people with a criminal record.

I would like to make it clear that New Democrats support this bill, but we want to know exactly how the government plans to stop promoters from abusing the system and people with disabilities. We need more information about how this bill and its measures will be implemented and how the public will be informed about it all.

Though this is a useful bill, I believe that one of the problems with the disability tax credit lies not with promoters, but with access to the tax credit. The tax credit application process is not that easy to understand. Sometimes, people with disabilities have a hard time getting the credit.

In my region, the Canada Revenue Agency closed its Rouyn-Noranda office. Those people would have understood. People with disabilities may have trouble accessing services. When those services are no longer available in our regions, the situation is even worse.

I would also like to take a few minutes to congratulate and thank the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. For several years now, he has been organizing information sessions to help people understand the process and get their refund more easily. He is supposed to come to my riding in the very near future. Many people with disabilities are waiting for him and are very eager to get this information. I really wanted to take the time to thank him today.

It is important to take some time to explain to people across Quebec and Canada how to get this tax credit, or in other words, to let them know who is eligible and what steps they have to take. Some people in my riding were able to get large retroactive refunds, which shows how important it is to facilitate access to this information and how essential and useful it has been for my constituents.

We must also ensure that the application is much easier for people to complete. We have to simplify the process and then, of course, properly inform the public. I would like to remind hon. members that the information sessions on the disability tax credit are vital and, unfortunately, this service may be reduced, particularly in remote areas, as a result of the cuts that are being made to the Canada Revenue Agency's regional offices.

If we want to stop promoters from abusing the system, we really have to look at the big picture. We can limit fees, but we must ensure that the information is available to people. That is essential. Giving people access to the information so that they can respond will help stop promoters from abusing the system. This is an essential step that must not be left out.

In order to build on the bill and improve access to the disability tax credit, it would be a good idea for the government to reverse the cuts it is making to the Canada Revenue Agency and give the department the resources it needs to make people aware of the tax credit and explain to them how to apply for it.

Of course, MPs' offices will also still be available to provide people with information and help them to navigate through this type of process. What is more, I encourage all members of this House, from all parties, who have not yet done so to set up information sessions to help those who could benefit from this tax credit.

I would like to remind the House that the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke's bill is worthwhile; however, I think that there are some details that could be ironed out in committee. I therefore urge my colleague to begin thinking about those details—how to determine the cost, for example—so that she can respond in committee to the questions I asked in my speech.

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to stand today in support of this important legislation. I want to thank and compliment my friend from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for undertaking the initiative, which aims to reverse a trend that has seen a vulnerable segment of our society, Canadians with disabilities, increasingly taken advantage of. It is a phenomenon that has left many Canadians rightly outraged.

Private Members' Business

The disability tax credit, or DTC, for short, is a non-refundable tax credit. It reduces the amount of income tax that either individuals with disabilities or those who support them have to pay. People who qualify for the credit must have a severe and prolonged impairment of mental or physical function as defined by the Income Tax Act and as certified by a qualified practitioner. This means that they must be unable to perform one or more of the basic activities of daily living, even with therapy and the use of appropriate devices and medication. Basic activities of daily living include things like speaking, hearing or eating.

Parliament brought in this tax credit recognizing that Canadians with disabilities face particular financial challenges for which they should receive tax relief. The maximum federal amount that could be claimed last year was \$7,341, resulting in tax savings of up to \$1,101 for the tax year 2011. The credit will be worth even more when people file their taxes this year. In 2012, federal tax savings will be up to \$1,792 for a child under the age of 18 and \$1,132 for remaining eligible individuals, or their supporting families, when they file their tax returns. A corresponding credit is also available for the calculation of provincial tax.

For the one in five Canadians with disabilities living on low incomes, this tax saving can make a major difference in the quality of their lives. We should not forget that people with disabilities are often seniors. It was shocking to learn that some of these individuals were being asked for and charged 20%, 30% or as much as 40% of the tax credit owing to them. That amounts to over \$20 million a year earmarked for people with disabilities that instead goes to the private sector promoters that help to prepare their claims.

These fees are being paid to promoters to complete part A, the first step in the application process to obtain a disability tax credit certificate. There is usually no need to get outside help to fill out this paperwork. Either the individual applying or someone in his or her family can generally complete it without assistance. If someone does need help filling out the forms, the CRA's call centre employees provide assistance by phone. Of course, this service is provided free of charge.

Once this step is out of the way, the applicant has a qualified health practitioner complete part B. After the form is filled out, it needs to be submitted to the CRA, which determines if the person is eligible for the tax credit, based on the information supplied by the medical practitioner. If the CRA concludes that the person qualifies, he or she only needs to include the disability amount on his or her income tax return. That is all there is to it.

Bear in mind that the CRA receives, on average, 200,000 new disability tax credit applications per year. It is estimated that roughly 9,000 of these requests are received from taxpayers who use the services of a disability tax credit promoter. Consider that last year alone, \$800 million in credits were issued. That is a lot of money, money intended to help the person with a disability, not a promoter.

If adopted, Bill C-462 would restrict the fees that can be charged for or accepted by promoters preparing a DTC application on behalf of someone with a disability.

● (1135)

A maximum fee will be established, and anyone who fails to respect this fee will face penalties. A minimum penalty of \$1,000 would apply when the maximum fee is exceeded. Just what the maximum fee should be will be determined following public consultations.

The bill also introduces a requirement that promoters notify the CRA when more than the maximum fees have been charged. Failure to inform the agency when an excess fee is charged would be an offence, and the promoter would be liable to a \$1,000 to \$25,000 charge. These provisions would come into force on a day to be fixed by the order of the Governor in Council, at which time the proposed maximum fee would be made public.

I remind the House that our government offers a very generous range of tax credits and benefits for Canadians with disabilities. These include the child disability benefit, a portion of the working income tax benefit and certain expenses eligible for the medical expense tax credit, among others. These valuable tax credits are among the many ways we are advancing our government's economic action plan, a plan for jobs, growth and prosperity, which is working for Canadians even as they face challenging times.

I want to be clear. This is not an attempt to crack down on the individuals legitimately claiming the credit or an attempt to deny anyone's claims. On the contrary, Bill C-462 is meant simply to make sure that those who qualify for the tax credit are able to receive it without paying unfair charges.

I want to be equally clear. Our goal is not to hinder businesses that operate above board. We believe firmly in a fair and functioning marketplace. We recognize that there are legitimate businesses, doing good tax preparation work, that are charging reasonable fees. The new provisions in Bill C-462 would apply only to those who take advantage of Canadians with disabilities by taking a huge cut of the tax credit they are due. We want to be sure that the price Canadians with disabilities pay for these services reflects the real value of the services they receive.

Tax discounters are guided by the Tax Rebate Discounting Act, and the fees they can charge for their services are capped. Tax professionals also have organizations that promote ethics and peer review of business practices. Once this act becomes law, the same standard of professionalism would apply to currently unregulated promoters that offer their services related to the disability tax credit, because we expect the same level of accountability and assurance of fairness for people with disabilities that all other Canadians enjoy.

This is a necessary and worthy step and is legislation that deserves the unanimous support of the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking today to an important bill, namely Bill C-462, which addresses disability tax credits.

Private Members' Business

Each year, Canada Revenue Agency receives 200,000 disability tax credit applications. In 2010 alone, the government paid out refunds or assigned non-refundable credits worth \$700 million.

A CBC story revealed that promoters were charging exorbitant fees to people asking for help and advice in order to obtain the disability tax credit.

Like many of my colleagues, I will be supporting this bill because I think there should be a limit to the fees charged by disability tax credit promoters. People with disabilities need to be protected so that they do not fall prey to certain promoters' scams.

The member sponsoring this bill hopes to accomplish that by reducing the fees charged by consultants when someone applies for the disability tax credit.

I, for one, feel that this needs to be studied in committee in order to clarify certain clauses of the bill so that they better respond to disabled people's financial goals. Disabled people have said that their most significant tax credit issues are unfortunately not addressed in this bill.

The disability tax credit application process is not entirely transparent, and disabled people have a hard time obtaining the tax credit because of the difficulty they have in filling out the certificate. The process needs to be simplified so that the disabled can have fair and equal access to the tax credit.

The application process is complex, and the tax credit remains very difficult to obtain. In my opinion, we must simplify the application process. Unfortunately, some unethical consultants prey on these people because they know the application process is complex and difficult. The terminology and definitions used in the paperwork are restrictive, unfair and result in inconsistency and discrimination. People find that the process for obtaining the tax credit is difficult, lengthy and overwhelming. They find the form difficult to understand and, consequently, often do not complete the process. They give up because, unfortunately, they often believe that it is pointless.

Eligibility for the credit requires a substantial change that prevents an individual from taking part in basic activities of daily living. I believe that the scope of this tax credit is too narrow, because people dealing with episodic disabilities all too often are not eligible for the tax credit. It is difficult for them to prove that their daily activities are significantly altered by their disability. Some days, they are less affected and they can do certain activities. However, on other days, they are not able to do them at all. The assessment criterion of basic activities of daily living is quite often a problem. The definition is too restrictive and, above all, contradictory. It is not in keeping with provincial and territorial definitions that doctors use, or those of other programs such as the Canada pension plan disability benefits.

The other problem is that it requires understanding and good will on the part of the doctors who must fill out the required forms. They find it very difficult to complete the certificate mainly because some disabilities are very complex and cannot always be assessed based on the definitions of daily activities.

Some people have missed out simply because their doctors gave them incorrect advice, based on an incorrect interpretation of the

eligibility criteria. Any kind of family support could make the person ineligible for the tax credit, since this support helps make their lives easier.

Many participants and doctors are seriously questioning the reliability of the eligibility certificate.

This bill will prohibit a promoter from charging or accepting more than the established maximum fee.

• (1140)

A promoter is defined as a person who, directly or indirectly, accepts or charges a fee in respect of a disability tax credit request. I have to wonder how these fees will be determined by the Governor in Council and how the public and promoters will be informed about the tax credit.

An exemption is still possible, but promoters will have to inform the Minister of National Revenue if they are charging more than the maximum. This provision makes me wonder how the minister will determine whether the higher amount is acceptable. Promoters who are found guilty of charging more than the established maximum or of providing false or misleading information to the minister will be liable on summary conviction to a fine ranging from \$1,000 to \$25,000. These offences will be set out in the Criminal Code and could result in a criminal record.

We are obviously not against all promoters, since many of them have integrity and provide important assistance to the people who could benefit from this credit but who do not understand the eligibility criteria and process, as I mentioned. However, we have some serious concerns about the less scrupulous consultants who tend to try to exploit these people.

In 2005, this government changed the criteria and began offering retroactive tax refunds. So promoters began offering taxpayers their services to help them maximize their refunds. However, some promoters abused the system by charging exorbitant fees for their services. This is quite problematic and certainly unacceptable because these fees can be up to 30% of the tax credit, which can add up to thousands of dollars because this tax credit refund is retroactive.

It is important to prevent promoters from abusing the system, while keeping in mind that not all promoters take advantage of their clients. It is therefore important to make a distinction between promoters who abuse the system and promoters who act as consultants by helping disabled individuals get this tax credit, which they probably would not have received were it not for the help of a promoter.

By limiting these billable fees, the bill will protect disabled individuals from these abuses. It is a good provision, which is why we support this bill.

The Conservatives' budget cuts to the Canada Revenue Agency has made the situation even worse. Unfortunately, disabled individuals now have limited access to certain services that they could have gotten from the Canada Revenue Agency. The situation is utterly appalling.

Last year, I was able to hold one last information session for disabled people in my riding on the disability tax credit, and the Canada Revenue Agency took part. It was unfortunately the last time we were able to provide this service to our constituents because the cuts made to the Canada Revenue Agency will mean that CRA will no longer be able to help us with the information sessions.

I would like to thank my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster, who continues to support us when it comes to this tax credit. He has been providing this information in his riding for several years now. So he is used to these kinds of information sessions, which my colleagues also greatly appreciate.

The assistance that the government is supposed to be offering to Canadians is being jeopardized by the cuts that the government is making to the Canada Revenue Agency. As a result of a lack of resources, the agency will no longer be able to adequately inform the public in question about the tax credit and meet demand by providing information sessions and other services. We are therefore seeking better protection against financial abuse and we want the government to place restrictions on the fees promoters charge people with disabilities. We also believe that additional information is required to make the bill more user-friendly in that regard.

Since my time is up, I would like to say in closing that we will support this bill and will thoroughly examine it in committee in order to improve it.

• (1145)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: For her five-minute right of reply, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, it is my pleasure to rise today to conclude the second hour of debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-462, An Act restricting the fees charged by promoters of the disability tax credit and making consequential amendments to the Tax Court of Canada Act.

As I stated when I last spoke to this bill, my intention in bringing this legislation before the House is very straightforward: I want increased protection for disabled Canadians from the predatory practices of certain disability tax credit promoters, some of whom see the tax credit as an opportunity to profit from the reduced circumstances of others.

The disability tax credit is a non-refundable tax credit that reduces the amount of income tax that either a person with a disability or a person supporting that person has to pay.

The need for this legislation was demonstrated to me once again as recently as last week, when a constituent of mine shared some correspondence from a promoter of the disability tax credit. The

promoter asked her to travel seven hours from our rural constituency in eastern Ontario to Toronto to have the house doctor fill out her CRA form after her application was rejected based on her own family doctor's assessment.

The promoter charges a percentage of the refund, and if there is no refund, there is no profit. The potential for abuse is too great, considering the amount of money involved, particularly in cases in which the credit can be claimed retroactively for 10 years.

I am pleased to acknowledge the statements and support from all sides of the House in the first hour of debate and today. I listened very carefully to my hon. colleagues regarding the details and clarifications they will be seeking on Bill C-462 when it is referred to committee for consideration, and hopefully I will be able to answer all the members' questions.

As a friendly observation, some concerns raised are beyond the scope of what Bill C-462 would seek to accomplish. Those concerns represent an opportunity for some other member of Parliament to propose a remedy in their own private member's bill. I look forward to working in committee with all members of Parliament to do the best we can to assist Canadians with disabilities. In conclusion, I thank all members for their support of Bill C-462 and I look forward to their input and recommendations in committee.

• (1150)

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for debate has expired.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 6, 2013, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: The House will stand suspended until noon today.

Government Orders

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:54 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

NORTHERN JOBS AND GROWTH ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-47, An Act to enact the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) moved that the bill be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, Canadians recognize that Canada's north plays a fundamental role in the wellbeing of our country. In fact, the north is poised to lead the country in terms of GDP growth in the next two years. The prosperity, security and environmental health of the north will go a long way toward determining the ongoing prosperity, security and environmental health of the entire country.

Given its essential role in Canada's present and future, it should come as no surprise to anyone that the north is a leading priority for our government. As the Prime Minister has often pointed out, Canada's north is a higher priority for our government than it has ever been under any past governments.

Many Canadians often think of the northern regions of this great country in terms of raw, untamed and resilient land, beautiful in its

diversity, yet harsh and unforgiving. Our northern lands are all of these things, but also much more. The north is home to thousands who rely upon the land and upon the resources of the north for their livelihood and their future.

The parliamentary secretary for aboriginal affairs and CanNor was today speaking at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada's aboriginal forum, entitled "Promoting Excellence in Engagement". Through events like this aboriginal forum, ways can be found to promote successful aboriginal participation in the mineral industry. We all benefit from sustainable and strategic development of natural resources in Canada.

We recognize that the ecosystems that survive in the north are delicate and must be protected for those who depend upon them. The cornerstone to ensuring the preservation of these delicate ecosystems is sound resource management based on principles and practices of sustainable use.

Part 1 of Bill C-47 is the Nunavut planning and project assessment act, which I believe will provide the people of Nunavut with the tools to plan and assess land, water and resource use in a responsible and sustainable manner. I believe the bill will empower the people of Nunavut to manage their own land and resource development in order to fuel strong, healthy and self-reliant communities.

Indeed, I am convinced that the bill would help the people of Nunavut make planning and project assessment decisions that would not only lead to greater economic development of the territory's land and resources, but also enable them to protect their environment and preserve a precious and unique natural heritage for future generations.

The importance of that balance between environment and development can be found in the preamble to part 1, where we clearly express our commitment to responsible economic development and protection of northern ecosystems while promoting the interests of Inuit, northerners and all Canadians. Our government is determined to ensure that responsible economic development and healthy ecosystems would both feature in Nunavut's future.

The Nunavut planning and project assessment act would provide the tools to achieve this goal. It will encourage community growth and prosperity and help ensure our land, water and air are safe and clean. It will assist in developing exciting new projects and preserving wildlife. It will encourage economic development and safeguard the environment.

The Nunavut planning and project assessment act will include three critical elements that would make this balance between environment and development possible.

The first element is land use planning.

Government Orders

Bill C-47 would set out a clear and comprehensive framework for land use planning. Effective planning starts with the development of priorities, policies and objectives, which would provide the foundation for that plan. In Nunavut, these priorities, policies and objectives were developed by the Nunavut Planning Commission in partnership with both the Government of Nunavut and the Government of Canada. This partnership allowed for a balance of local, regional and indeed national interests in the development of land use plans.

As development of the land use plan proceeds, extensive consultations will be undertaken. While much of the consultation will focus on the community level, Bill C-47 also ensures a balanced perspective by directing the commission to solicit the views of other stakeholders, including interested corporations, organizations and Canadians.

● (1205)

It is also important to note that the balanced approach to the development of priorities, policies and objectives in the land use planning stages will extend to the approval stage. In addition to requiring approval by the Government of Nunavut and the Government of Canada, land use plans will also require the approval of the Inuit leadership.

The second element that makes the balance between environmental protection and economic development possible is the single entry model for project assessment. Under this approach, development projects enter the system through a project description submitted to the Nunavut Planning Commission. The commission ensures that all development projects are guided by, and conform to, the land use plan.

Project proposals that are accepted by the commission are then sent to the Nunavut Impact Review Board, where they are subject to environmental assessment. The board carefully examines each project to ensure the ecosystem is protected and the wellbeing of Nunavummiut is also protected, while at the same time taking into account the wellbeing of all Canadians. In Nunavut, we truly implement the one project-one review principle. The board is also responsible for preparing project certificates for successful projects. These certificates set out the terms and conditions of projects which have been approved by the responsible regulatory minister.

I should point out that this part of the bill allows the Nunavut Impact Review Board to coordinate the environmental review process with the Nunavut Water Board, which manages the water licensing process. This will further strengthen the environmental scrutiny of potential projects while providing greater efficiency of process. In the end, a single entry model provides an effective, efficient and fully integrated process for considering project proposals, from the beginning of the planning process to the regulatory approval.

Finally, the Nunavut planning and project assessment act would ensure the balance between protecting the environment and allowing resource development to be maintained through strong enforcement provisions. It prescribes a robust enforcement scheme to help ensure that proponents follow precise requirements for both the land use plan and the approved project certificates after an environmental assessment.

An important feature of Bill C-47 is the balance between the requirement for the Nunavut Planning Commission and the Nunavut Impact Review Board to provide regulators and project proponents with clear objective determinations, recommendations, and terms and conditions. These parameters allow all partners to fully understand their respective responsibilities and obligations during project development and the enforcement provisions that proponents would be subject to. When the rules and consequences are clearly set out, proponents will have the confidence to invest in Nunavut knowing that the ground will not be shifting under them.

Combined, these three key elements, effective land use planning, a one project-one review model for project assessment, and robust enforcement, would enable Canada and the people of Nunavut to strike a healthy balance between encouraging economic development and safeguarding the environment.

With respect to part 2 of the bill, the Northwest Territories surface rights board act would fulfill the Government of Canada's obligation under the Gwich'in comprehensive land claim agreement and the Sahtu Dene and Métis comprehensive land claim agreement. Both agreements refer specifically to the need for a surface rights board. The establishment of the board is also consistent with the Inuvialuit final agreement and the Tlicho land claims and self-government agreement, which are the other two comprehensive land claims in the Northwest Territories.

The Tlicho agreement allows for the establishment of a surface rights board. The Inuvialuit final agreement specifies that any interim measures related to access across Inuvialuit land to reach adjacent lands would be replaced when a law of general application, such as this bill, is enacted.

● (1210)

The board is authorized to resolve disputes between holders of surface and subsurface rights and the owner or occupants of surface lands when agreements on terms, conditions and compensation for access cannot be reached by the parties in question. The board will have jurisdiction to resolve access disputes through the Northwest Territories. The board will, on application, make orders related to terms, conditions and compensations only where it has been requested to do so and only after such rights have been previously issued. In so doing, this board would contribute to greater certainty and predictability for long-term economic growth and job creation in the territory.

In setting up the Northwest Territories surface rights board, we believe Bill C-47 would create a clear, consistent, uniform process for resolving disputes related to lawful access to lands and resources in a manner that is fair and respectful of the rights held by aboriginal peoples and all northerners. That is not all. Since orders of the Northwest Territories surface rights board would be final and binding, rights holders, landowners and occupants would have a powerful incentive to negotiate and agree on terms, conditions and compensation for access that would benefit all parties, and in turn contribute to greater certainty and predictability.

Government Orders

Bill C-47 would fulfill the Government of Canada's legislative obligations flowing from the negotiated land claims in both Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. It proposes mechanisms to improve regulatory processes, encourage investment and allow resources to be developed in a sustainable manner. This would lead to jobs and benefits for future generations of Canadians.

One of our key priorities is ensuring a stronger, more dynamic economy for northern families and businesses. This bill was made in the north. We consulted with northerners, for northerners. The Nunavut planning and project assessment act is the result of open and widely held negotiations, discussions and consultations with the government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the Nunavut Planning Commission and the Nunavut Impact Review Board.

Consultations on the development of the Northwest Territories surface rights board act were extensive, as well. As I mentioned earlier, this bill would respond to our last legislative obligation from the Gwich'in and Sahtu land claims agreements and complete a regulatory regime that was originally envisioned in the Northwest Territories land claims agreements. This bill would ensure that further developments in the north are reviewed in a timely, clear and predictable manner. It would ensure that appropriate measures would be taken to protect fragile northern ecosystems, that those measures would be enforced, and that northerners and Canadians will enjoy the benefits of responsible resource development.

I can assure the House and all Canadians that we in this government are committed to creating a strong and prosperous north that realizes its resource potential while safeguarding its environmental health and heritage. Every day we uphold our pledge by working with northerners. This includes decisive, prudent actions for general greater economic development in the north, so that northerners prosper from the growth of northern businesses, skills and employment.

What specific recent advancements have been made to spur sustainable economic development in the north? The list is long. We have made economic development a central element of Canada's northern strategy. We have invested in the people of the north through programs like the northern adult basic education program, which was announced last year. We have taken firm steps to improve the system and processes we use to manage the exploration, stewardship and development of northern resources.

In May 2010, our government's action plan to improve the northern regulatory regime was announced. We have used our economic action plan to make hundreds of millions of dollars worth of targeted northern investments, to build infrastructure, undertake research, promote tourism and help young Canadians develop vital job skills. We have established the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and the northern projects management office to make sure investments are managed and delivered effectively.

Bill C-47 would greatly contribute to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of project management in the north. For projects in Nunavut, there would be no more overlapping and inconsistent processes, no more ad hoc procedures and shifting requirements, and no more duplications and delays.

●(1215)

For resource right holders seeking lawful access to resources in the Northwest Territories, the establishment of the surface rights board has potential to improve timely access to surface and subsurface resources. It would also increase the predictability and consistency of the northern resource management regime, which in turn would lead to long-term economic growth and job creation in the territories.

Many northerners remain closely tied to the land and the waters of the north, some for their livelihood, some for their very survival. The bill, if passed, will put in place legislated land use planning and environmental assessment processes in Nunavut that respect the northern environment and the distinct needs of the people who live there. In the Northwest Territories it will establish a clear balance and fair dispute settlement mechanism for access disputes for all Northwest Territories that is respectful of the rights of the aboriginal people and all northerners.

For generations, the people of the north have carefully managed their land, water and other resources. It is our duty as government, as parliamentarians and as legislators to ensure that the promising potential of economic prosperity in the north is managed in a sustainable fashion that protects the environment and unique ecosystem in the north. I urge my hon. colleagues to support Bill C-47.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-47 impacts both the constituencies that I and the minister represent. One of the issues with the bill is the fact that these very different entities were not treated with respect and given separate bills for the purposes of carrying on this discussion and to ensure that the issues inherent in such complex bills were well established in Parliament.

Land use planning is a very important element in the bill and I agree with the minister that this is important in the Northwest Territories. In the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, we have had a section on land use planning since its creation. Unfortunately, no land use plans have yet been put in place through that process, so the land use planning is much retarded.

We heard presentations from the Nunavut Planning Commission, which indicated that when the bill was passed with the kind of single entry approach, with the resources now had available to it, it would likely be in contravention of the act going forward.

The government is not putting forward the dollars to do environmental assessments. We saw that the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board—

●(1220)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I know we have 10 minutes for questions and comments and there are some members who wish to pose questions. I encourage hon. members to use their time as concisely as possible and then more members will have the opportunity to participate.

Government Orders

The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Mr. Speaker, as I stated very clearly in my comments, the legislation supports the implementation of the land claims agreement in place. Northerners want development and clear and concise time frames identified in the environmental review processes, and the bill does that.

In terms of resources, the member mentions there are provisions in place where the organizations go forward with work plans. They submit those work plans to the federal government that determines their budget allocations based on projects.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain for the minister that northerners who came before our committee did not feel that they had been listened to. In fact, the NTI worked very hard on comprehensive amendments to ensure that the language in the bill would mirror the language in the land claims and they were not accepted by the government.

As my colleague from the Northwest Territories said, the planning commission said that it would not be able to enact this legislation without additional funding and the government refused to accept any amendment that would allow for real participant funding or a five-year review. It is clear that with the concerns and the amendments put forward by northerners, which were not accepted by the government, there seems to be a need to at least review the legislation in five years.

Why did Conservatives not listen to the northerners at committee?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Mr. Speaker, the legislation has been in the works for a long time. I was on the Nunavut Impact Review Board when that party was in government and introduced an unacceptable bill under this provision.

Over the last few years, our government has consulted with northerners. We have worked very closely with Nunavut Tunngavik, the Nunavut government and the Nunavut Impact Review Board, as well as stakeholders. We were able to agree to many of the recommendations that came forward, but there were some that we could not.

Most of the recommendations that came forward from all parties were incorporated into the legislation now before us. I believe it draws a balance on what is the land claims agreement and it also does not change the language of the land claims agreement. We have accepted all the recommendations going forward that would be appropriate.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is so vitally important to the Canadian economy that we have the opportunity in an environmentally responsible way to develop the north.

I grew up in a northern community, in fact in Fort McMurray, Alberta, where natural resources coupled with the environment made it just a fabulous place to grow a family, but also ensured that we contributed to the Canadian economy.

This is new legislation moving forward to build the Canadian economy in the north. Could the minister comment on the specific economic benefits that we will see as a result of the legislation on

which she and her colleagues have worked so hard on and have held many consultations?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Mr. Speaker, northerners want to move forward in development. Northerners want jobs and want to see young people taking advantage of the training opportunities that come with development.

Yesterday we were at the PTAC conference in Toronto where we met many companies that were working with northerners and putting forward projects. It is important that we move quickly to ensure there is legislation in place that identifies predictable timelines and that allows greater certainty for businesses.

I have seen development in the north first hand. Just outside of Baker Lake we have a gold mine that opened in the middle of a global recession. The Agnico-Eagle company hired approximately 400 or 500 people. That community of Baker Lake had an unemployment rate of about 60% prior to the mining coming into force. Through the partnerships that the mining company established with the community and with the Inuit of that region, we were able to reduce the unemployment rate of Baker Lake to 4% in a very short period of time. People are working. Young people are working.

More northerners want to take advantage of those opportunities. Therefore, it is very important that we support the bill to allow that.

• (1225)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was evident during the committee hearings that changes should have been made to the legislation.

Maybe the minister could tell us why the Conservatives voted down every amendment that was put forward. We put forward 50 amendments, and they were all voted down. These amendments were put forward by the witnesses. They were the ones who wanted the changes, because they were the ones who had to deal with the legislation.

Is the minister concerned that including land claims areas still under dispute in the legislation could lead to legal action, in particular, Dehcho and Akaitcho territories? What does she have to say about the fact that there are still some concerns? We tried to put forward an amendment asking that it be reviewed within 4 or 5 years, as opposed to 10 years, to ensure organizations would not have their hands tied and that the legislation actually worked properly.

Could the minister elaborate on my questions?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the work relating to drafting the legislation has been years in the making.

Government Orders

I was on the Nunavut Impact Review Board when a draft bill was presented to our board without ever talking to any board member or without ever looking at the land claims agreement. There were many problems associated with the bill presented to northerners without any discussion or consultations with them, the governments or even the board. Clearly, it was against some of the provisions of the land claims agreements.

Through this process of consultation in developing the bill, a number of recommendations were put forward by a number of stakeholders and organizations. We worked with them for over two years to draft the bill. Many of those provisions were incorporated, but there were some areas on which we did not come to a consensus.

At the end of the day, the language is still consistent with the land claims agreements.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-47, An Act to enact the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts. I will not use the wildly inaccurate short title the Conservatives have dreamed up for this bill, because this is a bill that speaks to more than simply job creation.

The bill affects two regions of the country that are moving toward more self-determination at all times, two regions of the country that are settling their land claims in a good fashion with the opportunities that come with settled land claims.

We have a situation in the Northwest Territories where aboriginal governments and public governments have to get along. We have to learn how to get along and how to work together.

In Nunavut there is a single government that represents all the inhabitants of Nunavut, one land claim. Its job is slightly less complex than that of the Northwest Territories, but both are working very hard to achieve unique and satisfactory arrangements between the constitutionally entrenched rights of first nations and Inuit and the rights of public government that are held by all of us.

Bill C-47 was shown in committee to be very flawed. The Conservative member for Mississauga South said about it at committee, “No one got exactly what they wanted from this legislation”. None of the people in the north who wanted to see the legislation go forward got what they wanted.

The bill is so flawed that the Conservative member for Palliser said, “None of the stakeholders involved in the development of the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act got everything they wanted in the bill”.

Why is that? This is a bill for those people. This is a bill for the people of Nunavut to deal with their rights going forward. Why did they not get what they wanted? What was the problem?

This is a bill so poorly executed that the Conservative member for Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River said, “Nobody, including industry, got everything they wanted in this legislation”.

The bill is going forward in a flawed fashion. It is an essential bill. It is a bill that is needed by Nunavut, especially, for its requirements

for the legislation from this Parliament. It needs this. It has been waiting for this for a long time.

Committee witness after committee witness brought forward numerous mistakes Conservatives made in developing the bill, but they chose to ignore those. They chose not to address amendments. They simply voted them down, one after another.

As Chief Roy Fabian of the Kát'l'odeeche First Nation in the Northwest Territories said of the process used to develop this legislation, “It is extremely frustrating to attend meetings and express concerns, provide recommendations to address the concerns, and then see that input ignored”. Who knows better what is good for the north than those who reside in the Conservative headquarters in Ottawa?

Because the bill was so badly drafted, the opposition put forward 50 amendments to fix these mistakes and 49 of those amendments were recommended by various stakeholders. The 50th, which was another one, was based on wording from the parliamentary secretary who attended meetings in Yellowknife, substituting the word “and” for “or” in the legislation when he talked about the use and the understanding of traditional knowledge by those who were to be appointed to the board. We wanted to clarify that, but the Conservatives would not accept that either.

Let us look at some of the amendments we have put forward.

There were two amendments that would ensure the Nunavut Planning Commission would hold public hearings as part of its review of an application. This amendment was requested by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. It provided for transparency of process, which would make the commission more accountable. What is wrong with that?

● (1230)

There was an amendment making clear that projects approved under one land use plan would be grandfathered and would remain unaffected by changes or amendments to a land use plan. This amendment was requested by the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines. People in the industry wanted assurance when they went forward with a project that they would not be blind-sided later on by changes to any land use planning. Why would the Conservatives turn this down?

There are amendments replacing the vague word “opinion” with the word “determined”. These changes would have strengthened the language of the act. The amendment was requested by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the land claims group that worked so hard to establish its homeland in Nunavut. Its ideas for the bill were turned down.

There was an amendment that would require the board to have a participant funding program. By providing participant funding, the review process would be more efficient and economical. This amendment was requested both by NTI and by the Nunavut Impact Review Board.

Government Orders

We all know that in the north, communities that want to talk about projects that are going forward on their land are separated by large distances. It is very expensive to travel. The ability to get expert witnesses in front of a board to deal with these issues is absolutely imperative for these communities so that they can deal with the difficult questions that come out of projects of the magnitude we have seen proposed in Nunavut. This amendment would have guaranteed participant funding for those groups. It was turned down as well.

Another amendment from the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines would require that the act be reviewed by a committee of Parliament five years after it came into force. This was pretty straightforward. If 50 amendments came forward to us on the precise nature of the changes required to make the act work better, and all of them were rejected, would one not think it would be appropriate to provide a review process after five years? I sat on the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board when it was first set up. It was quite clear within two or three years of being put into practice what changes to that legislation were required.

We have a situation such that we will not have a review. The review is not going to take place. This legislation is going to be stuck. The opportunity to bring it back to Parliament will require political support from whatever government is in power at the time. It will have to be put back on the agenda to get some changes made. That is really not very good.

There was the amendment restricting the NWT surface rights board's jurisdiction to lands outside municipal boundaries. It provided certainty to municipalities that have planned for land use inside their own communities. This amendment was requested by the NWT Association of Communities and also by the non-governmental organization Alternatives North. It was a simple amendment that would have allowed municipalities to deal with their land in an appropriate fashion without having the strange situation that can come up when there are mineral claims within municipal boundaries.

Finally, and this is not finally in terms of all the amendments made but is the final one I am going to talk about, there was an amendment giving authority to the NWT surface rights board to require financial security to ensure compliance with its orders. This amendment was requested, once again, by Alternatives North. This comes from the practices we have had over the years. We have seen the results if we do not insist on financial security on behalf of the companies that want to use the land. We do not have to be told that this is a bad idea. This is a good idea. This would give certainty to everyone involved in the process.

All of these amendments went down and continue to go down. Discussion by Conservatives on the committee was practically nil. They did not want to talk about it. They were not instructed to talk about it. It really is an unfortunate fact of this legislation.

I could go on and on about these amendments, but I will now move on to the bill itself.

• (1235)

Parts of the bill implement long-standing commitments Canada has made under land claims agreements, most of them signed in the 90s, some under the Mulroney government and some under the

Liberal government. It should really have been the Liberals who developed the legislation as part of the land claims implementation process. However, like so many other things, the Liberals just did not get around to it. When they did produce drafts, as the minister has pointed out, they were not successful. Because of the Liberals' failure to complete their work in Nunavut, the land use planning process has been muddling on for 20 years.

Meanwhile, on the other side, in the Northwest Territories, the lack of a surface rights board has had absolutely no impact. In the absence of a surface rights board, an ad hoc system of arbitration panels was set up to deal with land access issues. In their 20-plus years of existence, only one application to resolve an access dispute has been filed, but it did not even proceed. In fact, even with this legislation in place, it would be unlikely that the board would be used. As the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs said to the committee: "[I]t probably won't be asked to do very much".

To paraphrase Norman Snowshoe, vice-president of the Gwich'in Tribal Council, testifying at the committee on the bill, what is the rush? Where is the problem? In fact, Mr. Snowshoe went on to say that they could have said more about the bill, but they do not have the resources to do a proper job of analyzing what the government is up to. Most of the other land claims groups and the groups in unsettled areas simply do not have the time to put into the kind of consultation required to determine whether this is in their interests or not.

The government's response is that we need to get this done for devolution. Devolution is an important aspect of moving forward in the north. There is no doubt about that. Certain agreements have to be in place. However, we have time.

The Conservatives chose to lump these two bills together. The surface rights board act probably should have been brought forward at a later time, when more aspects of the devolution deal were fully understood by northerners.

There has been very little public input, to this day, about devolution. When we talk about a bill that has to be done before devolution, we are talking about something that actually impacts on how devolution is going to turn out. Why do we have this rush now to put this in before devolution? Really, it should be part of the devolution discussions. It could have been put into any of the other amendments that are going to be required for devolution at the time devolution comes forward. If the government is serious about devolution and is serious about moving it forward, as it has said, then certainly, the NWT surface rights board act could have been dealt with at that time. It could have been part of that package.

Government Orders

We are really talking about a bill that is dealing with two regions of the country: NWT and Nunavut. If the bill was for these two regions of the country, why did the Conservatives consistently, and without any discussion, ignore all the recommendations for amendments that came forward from the legitimate groups that were witnesses in front of these committees? These were simple amendments. These people were not against the bill. They wanted to ensure that the bill would work correctly and would work for them and their interests. Surely, in this country, we can understand that.

Should the Conservative MPs not have been saying how the people of the north got what they wanted from the legislation rather than that no one got what they wanted? I learned a long time ago that if no one is happy with the job one has done, one has done a poor job. This legislation for Nunavut is required. It is part of what has to happen in Nunavut. The fact that so many of the amendments came from Nunavut says that people in Nunavut are not going to be satisfied in the end with the job the legislation does.

The NWT is close to a devolution agreement, according to press statements, but not according to any public process we have been able to identify that allows people in the Northwest Territories to understand what devolution actually is. However, Nunavut is still a long way from an agreement. Given these differences in where each territory is in the devolution process, why did we bundle the two acts together, implementing vastly different land claims requirements?

• (1240)

As Kevin O'Reilly, of Alternatives North, submitted at committee:

[W]e do not believe that placing several different implementation provisions in one bill is a proper approach. This makes amendments and meaningful debate difficult at best. We would have preferred for separate bills for each land claim area to allow for better consultation and opportunities for improvement.

That is precisely why the government bundled these two acts together. It does not want to hear from Canadians. The Conservatives have an assumption that they are right, that they are the ones in charge, and that their rightness is self-evident. Therefore, every act they have put forward in this new Parliament, with their shiny new majority, is perfect, and anyone who says otherwise is not really a good Canadian. As a northerner and a person who listened to the northerners, I would say that we did not get this bill completely right. We have not dealt with what the northerners want in it.

We have a requirement for this bill, and it will move forward. What gives me hope is that the other day, the Premier of the Northwest Territories indicated in a northern newspaper article that he was under the understanding that the surface rights board act would become NWT legislation after devolution. If that is the case, and it does become legislation that the Northwest Territories legislature can amend, then that act will only be imperfect for as long as the people of the north decide it is. That is a positive aspect. If the devolution agreement goes as the premier said, and the legislation will actually be transferred to the government of the Northwest Territories, then it will be our responsibility to make it work right. I have no doubt that we will do that.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Nunavut in the future. We have no devolution agreement in principle. It is my understanding that a negotiator has been appointed for devolution. That is a good sign. However, there was a negotiator appointed for

devolution in the Northwest Territories probably a dozen years ago or more. That is not a hopeful sign for Nunavut. Nunavut needs its say over the legislation it uses in its territory. Let us hope that Nunavut can move forward with devolution as well so that it can make the choices it needs to make for itself.

• (1245)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for the Western Arctic for his eloquent speech on the bill. He obviously has long-time experience working with peoples of the north, both first nations and those who have located there more recently.

I had the privilege of sitting in on one of the committee meetings. The witnesses were raising issues and concerns about their capacity to review projects. They were proud of the fact that they have a consensus-based government in Nunavut and that in many cases, the legislation requires or at least suggests that there be participation. It would be obligatory for plans and optional for policies. I note, in going through the bill, that there is no requirement to provide intervenor costs or any kind of participatory funding. The witnesses appeared concerned about that and shared some of their struggles in the past trying to intervene in big projects, such as Mary River, where they were dealing with complex information without assistance.

Could the member speak to whether he thinks the bill could be improved? Perhaps that could be a topic for the review he recommends should occur in five years.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the topic of participant funding was well understood by all the groups that spoke to us from Nunavut. They understand it was a good idea to include it in there. There was unanimity when we asked the different witnesses if they would support including participant funding in there. We are talking about a population diffused over 33 communities over 1.7 million square kilometres, a huge area. These people need resources to accomplish almost anything: the travel budgets, the need for consultants. The cost of these things goes up dramatically in the north.

We want small communities to respond correctly and appropriately because, if they do not, then confusion just reigns. Without participant funding, we are not going to see the certainty around the projects that we could with participant funding, so it is a very important part of what environmental assessment does.

We know the government is fiscally very conservative. However, was it simply the money that stopped the Conservatives from going along with the participant funding, or was it something else? They would not indicate to us by standing up and speaking to these amendments. There was silence on the other side.

Government Orders

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to why the government members did not support opposition amendments at committee, it is important for us to understand that extensive consultation with our aboriginal partners and other stakeholders happened in the Northwest Territories. Accommodations were made for various issues that occurred. Extensive policy discussion and review of legislative language was undertaken. The governments of Nunavik and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated had a chance for their voices to be heard. Both parts of the bill were designed and drafted in accordance with provisions in the land claim agreement in the Northwest Territories and Nunavik. None of the amendments proposed in the bill were required to improve the proposed acts and ensure consistency with existing land claims, so therefore they were not brought forward.

• (1250)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my fellow committee member here. However, in reality what we heard from Chief Roy Fabian was somewhat different. He participated in those hearings and said that he really got nothing from them. Interestingly enough, when the parliamentary secretary was talking about whether there should have been aboriginal representation on these committees—which is the case in the Yukon with its surface rights board where there is guaranteed aboriginal participation—the parliamentary secretary indicated that traditional knowledge would be part of it.

However, when we actually read the bill, we found that it was not an absolute. They could either be experienced in land and environment or traditional knowledge. Really what the parliamentary secretary said was a compromise to the aboriginal participation and, out of these sessions that were taking place on consultation, there really turned out to be nothing at all.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just for some clarification for the member across, here is the exact quote from Chief Roy Fabian, K'atl'odeeche First Nation. He said:

I did deliver a written submission in November 25, 2010 and I do not see any the revisions that we recommended reflected in the Act. This is not in accordance with meaningful consultation. At that time I expressed concern that Canada was simply "going through motions" of consultation and it appears that I was right. I do not see any of the substantive revisions that we recommended in November of 2010 are reflected in the Act. It is extremely frustrating to attend meetings and express concerns, provide recommendations to address the concerns and then see that input ignored.

Just on that note, given the fact that we have seen Idle No More and we continue to see action on Idle No More, when we are looking at the consultation piece here, does my colleague share the view that there was still consultation that could have been made, given the fact that there should have been some amendments? Also, how imperative is it to have a review done before the 10-year term?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, there are two different situations. In Nunavut, the five-year review is an essential element that should have been included in this bill. My own personal experience with federal legislation on land use and environmental assessment says that there are going to be problems with the bill that will come up very quickly. The thought that the Conservatives would not support the review says to me that they are really not open to

change. They are really not interested in anything other than their blinkered view of how legislation should work.

My hope lies with the Government of the Northwest Territories, if what the premier said was correct. The legislative assembly in the Northwest Territories is going to be the place where combinations can be made properly. That is where this power should reside in the end and, hopefully, will.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Western Arctic for his commitment on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

I continue to refer back to the five-year agreement of which we keep speaking. In Nunavut, in particular, it may well be within the first five years of the act that only one or two projects move forward. This would seem to be a very limited sample from which to try to draw any meaningful discussions with regard to the five-year act. In addition, such reviews often consume more resources, both financial and human, than are saved by marginal improvement results from what can turn out to be a very lengthy process.

I wonder if the member could comment on that.

• (1255)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, getting things wrong in legislation that deals with projects and environmental assessments is opening oneself up to going to court. Court would eat up a lot more costs and time than a review of legislation. The argument brought forward in committee not by Conservative members but, to a great extent, by government officials who seem to be running interference for the government, which is fair enough, just does not stand up.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be supporting this bill but, yet again, want to express our concern that the government seems to not understand what a parliamentary process is supposed to look like. When the committee travels to the north, the thoughtful people who have been dealing with these issues for a long time deserve to be heard in a real and meaningful way, which is two-way accountability between knowledgeable citizens and Parliament.

Yet again, the government has refused to accept one, not one, amendment to this bill. The government seems to think that amendments wreck bills. We on this side think that amendments improve bills and resolve weaknesses that have been identified by witnesses. Amendments reflect what members heard. As the member for Western Arctic said, the thoughtful people who went to committee had actually crafted the amendments themselves and yet the government refused to listen.

As I have said in the House before, the Liberal Party understands and supports the goal of bringing further clarity to the regulation of land use in the north and, in particular, the dispute resolution process for surface and subsurface rights. The 2008 McCrank report made it clear that the north is struggling with gaps in surface rights legislation to resolve disputes with landowners who did not want to grant access to their lands for development projects.

Government Orders

With an estimated \$8 billion worth of mining investments ready to pour into Canada's north over the next decade, the Liberal Party supports closing these legislative gaps. However, as the member for Western Arctic said, we are not sure why this was not done in two dedicated bills for the two jurisdictions being folded into this one piece of legislation.

[*Translation*]

This government needs to take a much more comprehensive approach to the issue of northern development.

With regard to the land claims agreement, the first part of the bill enacts the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act, which implements certain provisions of articles 10 to 12 of the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

[*English*]

Since 2002, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., or NTI, and the government of Nunavut have been working on developing the legislation through the Nunavut legislative working group. This work has been supported by the Nunavut Planning Commission and the Nunavut Impact Review Board.

We are troubled about the concerns raised by NTI that portions of the bill regarding Nunavut do not mirror the language in the land claims agreement and the government's refusal to address these concerns with the amendments that they proposed.

We also heard from the Nunavut Planning Commission that, based upon current information, an initial \$2,918,284 is necessary to effectively prepare for and implement the new legal requirements that accompany the legislation. In addition to this needed funding, \$1,878,284 of indexed core funding would also be required for ongoing implementation responsibilities.

We heard testimony from Sharon Ehloak of the commission who made it clear when she said, "We will not be able to enact this legislation without additional funding. There's just no question about it".

It is not just the planning commission that is raising concerns. Mr. Rick Meyers, vice-president for the Mining Association of Canada, told us:

...most of the boards across the north have been marginally funded, if you like, if not underfunded. They do get the work done and deliver good product, but they do it at some challenge....

I think it's very important that the co-management boards be funded properly.

● (1300)

We are concerned that if those responsible to implement the legislation do not have the resources to do it, we are setting them up to fail, and northerners will not see the benefits that are expected from this legislation. When the minister, the member for Nunavut, was speaking this morning, it was disappointing to hear that she was not able to give any assurance that there would be funding to accompany this legislation.

The government's response to this concern is that necessary money will be provided through the implementation phase of the process. Essentially, the government has said simply, "Trust us; we

will handle it; don't worry about the needed funding", but Ms. Ehloak testified that

The government has told us that it's moving forward as cost neutral. That's been unacceptable. We will not be able to fulfill the obligations if the legislation moves forward without the funding.

In fact, the Nunavut Planning Commission has been trying without success to negotiate an implementation contract for years, so how can we trust the government when it says it will now resolve this crucial issue of adequate funding?

The goal of part 1 of Bill C-47 is to ensure that any project proposed in the Nunavut settlement area will be carefully examined for its potential impact and benefits. The Nunavut Planning Commission and the Nunavut Impact Review Board will examine, consult and respond to specific project proposals, determine whether they conform to the land use plan and assess how these projects will affect the Nunavut settlement area. This determination will require appropriate consultations, but affected parties and relevant organizations may not have the financial resources to participate effectively or at all.

That is why Liberals have called for a participant fund to be established to ensure that proper consultation will take place. This is at the suggestion of many witnesses and many northerners who felt that a participant fund was not without precedent. When the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was enacted, sections 57 and 58 recognized this challenge and provided there for participant funding.

All other parties to the working group advocated for such a fund, but the government alone refused to agree with the negotiations. It was disappointing to hear the official make it sound as though it was approved, when indeed it was quite clear that there was only one party at the negotiations that refused to agree to a participant fund, and that was Canada. When the Liberals later proposed that the responsible minister should establish a participant funding program to promote public participation in the review of the projects, the government again refused to consider it.

Bill C-47 is an incredibly complex legislation, and the portions pertaining to Nunavut are the product of more than a decade of negotiations. We have heard concerns from the land claims organization, NTI, about some of the language in the legislation not mirroring that in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and we have heard concerns from the Nunavut Planning Commission about a lack of funding to properly implement this legislation. The Nunavut Chamber of Mines and the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada testified that given the complexity of this legislation, "further refinements and adjustments will be necessary".

Given this complexity and these concerns, a mandatory five-year review of how this legislation performs, once implemented, would have been prudent, but the Conservatives refused our amendment to insert such a review out of hand. The Conservative government's refusal to accept any amendments, regardless of how sensible or minor or bottom-up, is truly troubling.

Government Orders

● (1305)

[Translation]

As for the broader question of northern development, the Liberals believe that a lot more needs to be done besides simply streamlining regulations related to surface rights and dispute resolution mechanisms in order to develop the enormous economic potential of the north.

[English]

For example, the federal government still has no plan or capacity to clean up a major spill in icefield waters. Canada must develop the capacity to respond to environmental threats, such as an oil or gas spill resulting from resource extraction in the arctic. These emergency response capacities must be part and parcel of any streamlining of the regulatory process for land use in the north.

Northern economic development will also require investments in basic needs such as education, housing and health, as well as the infrastructure required to support a growing population and economy.

The Prime Minister does not actually seem to understand northern development. It has to be more than military deployments and extracting natural resources. Northern development must also deal with the societal, social and economic welfare of the people who live there.

For instance, Canada has a serious food insecurity problem. In northern communities some estimates put it as high as 79%, or 8 out of 10 people, without sufficient food. The Food Banks Canada report “HungerCount 2012” brings that struggle into disturbing focus. The report notes that one of the few long-standing food banks in the territories has seen an alarming 18% increase in use over the past year and that residents of Iqaluit spend 25% of their total expenditures on food, compared to the Canadian average of 11%, yet the Conservative government has stubbornly refused to admit that the nutrition north program that was supposed to deal with the situation has failed to bring down the costs of weekly food budgets.

The stark reality of Inuit education today is that roughly 75% of children are not completing high school, and many who do find that their skills and knowledge do not compare with those of non-aboriginal graduates. Low education outcomes are associated with adverse social implications, including greater unemployment, greater numbers of youth entering the criminal justice system and greater incidence of illness and poverty.

Without equal access to education and training, northern Canadians will not benefit from the employment opportunities that resource development will create. Instead of developing appropriate programs to address this need, the Conservative government is actually cutting existing support.

For example, the Conservative government has ended the successful aboriginal skills and employment partnership. Canada's resource sector companies were some of the most active participants in this program and have criticized its cancellation.

Critical gaps also remain in terms of transportation, such as the planned development of a deepwater port at Nanisivik that has been scrapped in favour of a part-time summer-only fuelling station.

[Translation]

Iqaluit still does not have a deepwater port and Nunavut Premier Aariak recently indicated that the lack of ports and roads connecting northern communities to each other and to the south is constraining economic and social development.

[English]

In short, unlocking the tremendous potential of the north is much broader than streamlining the regulatory process for land use and development. The government needs to have a much more holistic approach to economic development in the north. However, as I said earlier, despite the fact that this bill is by no means perfect, we do believe that there are significant positive aspects to the legislation.

In closing, one of the great privileges of being a member of Parliament is getting to see all over this wonderful country. It was in the summer of 1998 that I was first able to visit Nunavut, a year before it became a territory. We had an arctic caucus with former Nunavut MP Nancy Karetak-Lindell. We were then visiting Baffin, Grise Fiord and Resolute. I was just captivated by the majesty of the land and the dignity of the people who live in Canada's north.

I think I have been back at least once a year ever since, and that is why the Prime Minister's annual trip to Canada's north is always tough for me: because it never deals with the real problems facing northerners. Northerners deserve more from a Prime Minister than an annual photo op focused on military exercises, ignoring the real challenges of the people of the north and refusing to listen to the solutions that must come from northerners.

● (1310)

The standard of living and quality of life for northerners must meet both Canadian and international norms and minimums. The Arctic millennium development goals are way behind. The federal government must invest not only in basic needs such as education, housing and health but also in the infrastructure, like the ports that will be required to support the growing population and the economy as well as natural resources extraction.

The Prime Minister does not seem to understand northern sovereignty. It has to be more than military deployments and extracting natural resources. Northern sovereignty must also deal with the social and economic welfare of the people who live there. Our northern sovereignty depends on northern peoples. It is time he listened to them and worked with them on their priorities.

Government Orders

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would mention to the member that it was our government that increased the living allowance for the north. I believe that when we increased it in one of our first budgets, it was the first time the increase had been given to northern persons for decades and decades.

The other point I would mention is mining and how important it is. This weekend we were in Toronto. There were mining companies there from around the world and across Canada. They were very excited about the potential for mining in Canada. Not just the mining companies were excited, but aboriginal leaders were there as well among the groups learning how they can work together to develop the industry responsibly.

I would encourage the member to visit or to have dialogue with some of the industry and the leaders who were visiting this past weekend, because they do have some concerns about a bill that the Liberals will be putting forward on mining.

That is just a comment and not a question. Thank you.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, increasing a living allowance by a tiny amount and then watching the food prices go through the roof is exactly what the government keeps trying to defend. It is defending the indefensible.

The fact on the ground is, before people could feed their families, and now they are hungry. This is serious. There is no housing up there. There are 12 people living in one house. It is the reason northerners wanted the long form census. They want people to know the dire straits in terms of housing needs that exist up there.

Frankly, for the government to have cancelled the very successful aboriginal skills and employment partnership, means that what we have described from the chambers of commerce out there, even Whitehorse, where first nations are there, the mining companies are there, it is a situation of jobs without people and people without jobs.

We actually need a federal government that is prepared to invest in the people so that they can be equipped to realize the potential of the north, but also be able to direct the priorities themselves by both education and training.

• (1315)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech on this issue and for the work she did in committee, along with the official opposition. We presented many amendments that should have been listened to in a better fashion.

I would like the hon. member's understanding of why the Conservative members refuse to really even talk about these amendments. We would think, after the amendments were presented by witnesses before the committee, friendly witnesses, not hostile witnesses, that there would have been a more fruitful dialogue on committee.

Does my hon. colleague have any explanation for the silence that came from the government side?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the member will be surprised at my answer. I remember as a backbench Liberal member of Parliament occasionally being confronted with a situation where a

government would bring a bill to committee thinking it was perfect, thinking it had already consulted enough and wanted to ram it through. Its ears were closed. It did not seem to be able to listen to thoughtful, constructive amendments. It is like a baked cake that comes to committee and anything else is just a nuisance.

We once overheard Parliament referred to as a minor process obstacle. That is unfortunately what the Conservative members opposite have been persuaded is their job, to just not be an obstacle and let the government do whatever it wants and to not listen to witnesses because that will get in the way of this masterpiece government bill.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my experience around here is that when a government bill is put forward and the opposition brings forward amendments, often not legal amendments in that they would change the scope of the bill once it has passed second reading, if the amendment is accepted, the opposition uses it as an opportunity to bash the government, to say that the government did not know what it was doing. It becomes a negative instead of a positive.

Would the member agree that is really what happens with politics and that it is not necessarily a good use of our time and proper legislation overview?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I feel sorry for the member, Mr. Speaker. That cynical view is really not why I came to this place. I came here to make better bills and better policy.

We see the shenanigans of the Conservative government at in camera meetings of committees. We go in camera to try to write a committee report and find great hunks of testimony hacked out. The Conservatives do not even understand that people who read *Hansard* know what we heard.

In a situation like this we are thoughtful people. The NTI came with many amendments that it had written itself. This is not us staying up all night trying to write things that will wreck a bill. This is us listening to northerners on what is going forward.

Going forward, I hope the member will understand that we are not here to play politics. We are here to make good laws for the people of Canada.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the questioner before me has no idea what this legislation is all about, because he chose to ask a question that had nothing to do with the bill.

I want to raise some awareness about what we heard at committee. Sharon Ehloak, executive director of the Nunavut Planning Commission, said:

This legislation brings new obligations that are outside of the NLCA, the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. First and foremost is the public registry; the commission will be obligated to do that. We proposed to government back in 2010, and all our partners, a proposal for an online public registry—not a Cadillac model, but something that would work and provide the commission with adequate systems to be able to respond to the additional applications that will be coming to us. We will require language obligations with that registry, and with this bill, that will be significant. For us to provide one word in English, it's a \$2 cost to the commission as the cost of translation.

Government Orders

She goes on to say, “In our organizational capacity, currently we have left positions vacant simply to meet our current needs. We will not be able to enact this legislation without additional funding”.

Maybe my colleague would like to raise the issue about funding again since the colleague across did not know what he was talking about.

● (1320)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, we were quite concerned in hearing the testimony from the commission that it would be unable to implement the law when it was passed because it did not have the money to even do what it was being asked to do now, such as a program that would meet the language tests in the three languages of the territory. This is a very serious issue with regard to funding

As we know, both the opposition parties were very worried that without participant funding none of these organizations could do their work if people could not afford to come to talk to the commission about their needs. I thank the member for reminding us about the need for an online registry. That would make things so much easier, but it would cost money.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

[English]

I rise to speak to Bill C-47, An Act to enact the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts. The New Democrats will be supporting this bill despite the reluctance on the part of the government to adopt any of our amendments, which is surprising since it is such a lengthy piece of technical legislation. Even Conservative committee members acknowledged that it was not all of what anyone wanted, but refused to accept improvements to the bill as requested through witness testimony. The witnesses are the people who will have to implement or abide by the legislation.

Certainly the NDP supports consultation and consensus-based decision making that respect the autonomy of the government of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. Yet it can easily be argued that this should have been two separate pieces of legislation. While that would have made sense, it is also important to move these two items forward.

Part of this legislation is related to mining in the Northwest Territories. My colleague, the member for Western Arctic, has given an articulate account of our thoughts on that matter. His insight reflects the history of mining in that area and frames the way forward through the challenges that have been dealt with, some of which, it must be said, not dealt with particularly well.

My colleague showed how mining was critical to the northern economy, but he also showed how there was a significant public cost associated with projects that went wrong. He explained how the government was on the hook for the environmental fallout associated with the Giant Mine. In that case, we are left with 270,000 tonnes of arsenic perpetually frozen underground and will have to be dealt with by future generations. This is the kind of outcome the New

Democrats have been reminding the government about on all manners of projects and its reluctance to admit there are environmental costs that relate to natural resource projects is mind-boggling and speaks to a kind of wilful ignorance that creates a climate of mistrust on all manners of initiatives as a result.

Suffice it to say, the New Democrats feel that more consultation should have been allowed on the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act part of this bill. However, that part of the bill does not sit in isolation and we are glad to see that the Nunavut land claims agreement is moving ahead, considering that it has been in preparation for almost two decades. Yes, that was even under the Liberals.

Certainly, that element of this bill is less contentious. This part of the legislation has been around this place for a number of years. It was originally introduced in 2010 as Bill C-25, the Nunavut planning and project assessment act. Given the length of time it has been in the works, we can understand that there may be some frustrations from the people who live in Nunavut. They have been waiting for their legislation to pass so they can move on and begin understanding how it will work.

When we look back at the legislative summary of the former Bill C-25, which still applies to Bill C-47, it reads:

In a landmark ruling in 1973 the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that Aboriginal peoples' historic occupation of the land gave rise to legal rights in the land that had survived European settlement. In 1982, the Constitution was amended to “recognize and affirm” the “existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.” “Treaty rights” include rights under land claims agreements.

Those developments lead to the Nunavut land claims agreement of 1993, which lays out some key objectives that are related to the legislation before us. They are: to provide for certainty and clarity of rights to ownership and use of lands and resources and of rights for Inuit to participate in decision-making concerning the use, management and conservation of land, water and resources, including the offshore; to provide Inuit with wildlife harvesting rights and rights to participate in decision-making concerning wildlife harvesting; to provide Inuit with financial compensation and means of participating in economic opportunities; and to encourage self-reliance and the cultural and social well-being of Inuit.

The provisions of the Nunavut land claims agreement provide for the federal government and the Inuit to establish a joint regime for land and resource management in articles 10 to 12.

● (1325)

Article 10 sets out the criteria for the land and resource institutions to be created, while article 11 sets out the parameters for land use planning within the Nunavut settlement area. Article 12 details how development impact is to be evaluated.

Government Orders

Under article 10, the federal government undertakes to establish the following government institutions to administer the regime: a surface rights tribunal, Nunavut Planning Commission, Nunavut Impact Review Board and Nunavut Water Board. Part of this was dealt with when Parliament enacted the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act, in 2002. The current bill meets the government's obligations as they relate to the other two institutions, the Nunavut Planning Commission and the Nunavut Impact Review Board. That said, we are well aware that both of these institutions already exist; they have existed since 1997, under the Nunavut settlement agreement. Bill C-25, and now Bill C-47, formalize their establishment in legislation and set out how they will continue to operate.

We can look to the legislative summary, which tells us that work on the Nunavut planning and project assessment act began in 2002. To fulfill its obligation for close consultation with Inuit, the Government of Canada established a Nunavut legislative working group, consisting of the Government of Canada, represented by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and the Government of Nunavut, supported by the participation of the NPC and the NIRB. The working group met regularly through 2007 to discuss and resolve policy issues, gaps that the bill should address, and resolve questions and legal interpretation of the agreement and how these solutions should be reflected in the bill. When these issues were satisfactorily advanced, in 2007, drafting of the bill began, with oversight and direction from the working group.

The government's backgrounder allows us to summarize the parts of the bill that are relevant to the Nunavut planning and project assessment act. It states that the proposed legislation would continue the functioning of the commission and board and clearly define and describe their powers, duties and functions, including how their members are appointed. It would also clearly define the roles and authorities of Inuit, federal and territorial governments. It would establish timelines for decision-making in the land use planning and environmental assessment processes, to create a more efficient and predictable regulatory regime. It would define how and why, and by whom, land use plans would be prepared, amended, reviewed and implemented in Nunavut.

It would also describe the process by which the commission and the board would examine development proposals and harmonize the assessment process for transboundary projects, by providing for a review by joint panels and an opportunity for the board to review and assess projects outside the area that may have an adverse impact on the Nunavut settlement area.

It would provide for the development of general and specific monitoring plans that would enable both governments to track the environmental, social and economic impacts of projects and establish effective enforcement tools to ensure terms and conditions from the plans and impact assessment processes are followed. It would also streamline the impact assessment process, especially for smaller projects, and provide industry with clear, consistent and transparent guidelines, making investment in Nunavut more attractive and profitable.

Given the fact that I do not have much time to finish my speech, I will end with this. It is clear that there is a fair amount of support for the Nunavut part of the bill. New Democrats will be supporting the

bill, but we feel it should have been improved at committee. Unfortunately, government members refused to do this.

New Democrats will continue to fight for the rights of northerners and for the long-term prosperity of northern communities. In as much as the bill largely supports that idea, we will give it our support. Hopefully, through the questions, someone will ask me to finish my speech.

• (1330)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found that to be a very profound speech on a very important matter. I would like to hear more from the member, and perhaps she has other matters to share.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that someone has asked me to continue with my speech because we have so much still to share on this issue.

My colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan indicated this goes back to 2010, when the Nunavut Water Board appeared before the aboriginal affairs committee to support the bill, along with other organizations and some of the mining companies. However, that support was not unanimous and there were still some concerns around parts of the legislation. Among the bigger concerns that the committee heard in 2010 were questions related to funding, and we heard a lot about funding.

I will leave it there to see whether anyone wants to know something else.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was an attempt to bring forward several amendments at the committee stage, and it was somewhat of a disappointment that the government did not respond to them.

Could the member indicate what she believes are the three most important amendments that the government could accept and that would make the most significant difference from her perspective?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly say there were a lot of amendments. The NDP alone put forward 50 amendments.

It is unfortunate that the bill has not been passed by now. We know there was work being done by the Liberals on this, but they have dragged their feet.

There were some funding requirements that we wanted to see put in there, and let me speak for a few minutes about these requirements. Mr. Paul Quassa, chair of the Nunavut Planning Commission, was one of the witnesses, and he talked about the importance of this bill, saying:

That said, this organization has been critically underfunded for nearly a decade. Industry and Inuit have told us that the land use planning process takes too long, and we agree. However, without additional resources, the commission is helpless to respond.

Government Orders

Another recommendation we made was with respect to the review process, and the Conservatives certainly did not want to hear about it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her comments and speech. She comes from a community in northern Ontario.

These kinds of comments need to be brought before the House, and she is right to say that we need to look at this bill. I am learning a lot today, hearing my colleagues discuss it.

There are many first nations in my colleague's riding, which is in the north. How does she feel this bill fares in terms of respecting first nations?

We have been hearing a lot about first nations recently. There was the Idle No More movement, Shannen's Dream, Attawapiskat, residential schools and funding for police services for first nations. Now we can add this bill and first nations consultations to that list.

I would like to hear her opinion or what she heard from witnesses and people taking part in consultations. Is this bill respectful? And what do first nations chiefs think about it?

• (1335)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the testimony heard in committee clearly showed that chiefs also needed more time to hold consultations because they were limited in terms of obtaining participant funding. That is important to note.

As the members are aware, the NDP supports consultations and consensus-based decision making, which respect the autonomy of the governments of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. More consultations should have been held concerning the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act.

The NDP will continue to defend the rights and interests of northerners, and we will promote the long-term prosperity of northern communities. That is exactly what all the chiefs across Canada want.

Chiefs want more consultations to determine which types of bills should be implemented in order to improve their communities.

Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to join my colleagues in this debate on Bill C-47.

As a number of my colleagues in this House have already said, this bill raises issues of particular importance to Canada's northern communities. It combines two main bills, An Act to enact the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act and makes related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

In addition to implementing some provisions of land claim agreements that were reached more than 20 years ago, this bill includes measures that would have a direct impact on development in Canada's north and the way in which natural resources are developed in that part of the country.

We all know that natural resource development is the basis for a large part of the economic activity in Canada's three territories. As elected members, it is important to do everything possible to promote development and prosperity in the region.

There is no denying that businesses that develop natural resources are major job creators. Their economic activities can also lead to the construction of new infrastructure, such as roads or railways, which benefit the entire territory in which they choose to become established. Sometimes, even when the business leaves, the territorial government may take over the infrastructure and continue to improve it for the entire population.

However, we must not forget that, given the very nature of the industry, natural resource development can have disastrous consequences for the environment and also for the communities that depend on the jobs it creates.

A natural disaster—a toxic spill, for example—affects more than just the environment, the fauna and the flora. If the company has to leave the region because it cannot continue to develop the resources, all the communities that depend on this major source of employment feel the impact. When we talk about the environmental impact, we have to keep this important aspect in mind.

From a sustainable development perspective, it is also important to take into account other aspects, particularly the social aspect. With that in mind, it seems crucial to me to ensure that a sufficiently binding legislative framework is in place to enable the various levels of government to track the economic, social and environmental impacts of all natural resource development projects in the country, particularly in northern Canada.

That is one of the reasons why it is important to study Bill C-47 in the House, because it responds in part to requests that come to us directly from northern communities.

As the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, I myself represent a riding where natural resource development plays an important role in the regional economy. For example, I am thinking of the forestry industry, which, unfortunately, has suffered significantly in recent years. The thousands of forestry workers have been abandoned by the Conservative government. I am thinking of the former employees of AbitibiBowater in Donnacona and a number of communities in my riding. Despite that, we cannot ignore the fact that this industry was very important to numerous families in my riding, be they in Saint-Raymond or Sainte-Brigitte-de-Laval.

The mining industry also comes to mind. It employs several hundred workers in my riding, particularly in western Portneuf. I know this is also the case in other areas of Canada where the mining industry hires hundreds, if not thousands, of Canadians.

Government Orders

In my riding, the many mining sites, which are mainly sand quarries and gravel pits, are in the municipalities of Rivière-à-Pierre, Saint-Marc-des-Carrières and Saint-Raymond and in the unorganized territories north of the Portneuf regional county municipality.

Having these industries in my riding has given me a better understanding of the benefits they provide to the regional economy, as well as the importance of ensuring that their development of our natural resources complies with the principles of sustainable development.

I think it is essential to ensure that the economic, social and environmental impacts of this kind of project will benefit all members of the community, as well as future generations. That is why I share the concerns expressed by my colleague from Western Arctic in the eloquent speech he made earlier today.

● (1340)

The first part of Bill C-47, which deals with the Nunavut planning and project assessment act, seeks to improve the existing regulatory regime to give Nunavut more decision-making power regarding the speed and extent of planning within its own territory and regarding its resources, particularly by establishing a framework to determine how environmental assessment processes will be conducted and how licences will be granted for various projects.

In addition to focusing on the critical issue of environmental protection, these legislative provisions will also implement part of the Nunavut land claims agreement, while respecting the results of negotiations conducted by the territorial government of Nunavut.

Bill C-47 at least partially addresses a real need expressed by part of Canada's northern community and should pass at third reading. From the beginning, the NDP has been defending the rights and interests of northern Canadians, and we will continue to defend them in the future. That is why we believe that Bill C-47 should pass at third reading.

However, it cannot be said that creating this bill was entirely problem-free or that the version we are discussing here today is perfect. On the contrary, we know that the bill is not perfect and that it does not meet all of the demands of people who live in Canada's northern communities.

The second part of the bill, which deals primarily with the Northwest Territories surface rights board act, continues to raise a number of concerns among the opposition members and the people living in Canada's northern communities.

As several of my colleagues have said, many witnesses were invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development regarding Bill C-47. In spite of that, it seems that very few suggestions, if any, were taken into consideration by this government.

This was noted at committee, because consultations had taken place beforehand. When witnesses were given a preliminary version of the bill, some of them said they did not see any of the suggestions or recommendations they had made regarding the bill during the prior consultations.

In committee, my NDP colleagues tried to propose 50 amendments. That is a significant number. These 50 amendments were proposed to try to address the witnesses' concerns. The vast majority of these witnesses came directly from the aboriginal communities where companies are developing natural resources. The witnesses were not all opposed to Bill C-47. On the contrary, the majority of them simply wanted to ensure that the bill truly addresses the needs of our northern communities.

Unfortunately, as usual, the Conservatives refused to listen to the legitimate concerns of the Canadians directly affected by what is in Bill C-47. They once again refused to collaborate with the opposition and would not consider the amendments we proposed. We understand that it is not possible to accept all the amendments, but the Conservatives should at least look at them, think about them and debate them before systematically rejecting them. This would be an improvement over how the government normally operates.

It is as though as soon as the Conservatives formed a majority government, they felt they knew absolutely everything and were no longer required to consult with opposition members or the Canadian public.

It is unfortunate that, yet again, we are faced with the kind of arrogance and closed-mindedness that we have seen from the Conservatives since they became a majority government.

I have spoken out about this a number of times in the House and I am not the only one. My many colleagues, from the official opposition and the third party and from those who belong to unrecognized parties in the House, have all criticized this fact. However, the government refuses to listen to reason and to change its ways. The same thing happened when the government refused to split Bill C-47 in two parts, so that we could examine the impact of the different laws in the bill more closely. Once again, there is more than one.

● (1345)

These laws would have benefited from individual reviews, so that we could properly understand the effects they will have on the different northern communities. I hope that the government will soon drop its arrogant attitude. It refuses to collaborate with the opposition and refuses to listen to our suggestions. The opposition could have helped improve this bill, and we hope to be able to do so in the future.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the time to thank the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier for her excellent speech. I especially appreciated the comparisons she made with what is happening in her riding with regard to the forestry industry and communities. I truly appreciated it, and it was refreshing to hear that in the House. I thank her very much for that.

I want to address the last part of her speech. She spoke about some 50 amendments proposed by the NDP. Unfortunately, all of those amendments were rejected. That is extremely sad because they were all based on testimony given by experts or people affected by this bill.

Government Orders

My colleague is a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. My question is really very simple. I do not know if the same thing is happening in her committee as in mine, where the opposition's amendments are being refused. Does she not find this extremely arrogant? As she mentioned, we get the impression that the Conservatives think they are all-knowing. I would like her to expand a bit on that, if she does not mind.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her excellent comments, which unfortunately reflect the reality that I face every week at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

That being said, I love this committee, which at least seeks to address issues that are extremely important to our official language minority communities. It is a shame that these communities, like northern communities and other communities and groups in Canadian society, are directly affected by the Conservatives' uncompromising attitude both in committee and in the House. The Conservatives have a bad habit of imposing time allocation on various bills, limiting debate and restricting the opposition's role.

The Conservatives are trying to prevent the opposition from scoring any victory, no matter how small, even if their actions could end up hurting hundreds or even thousands of Canadians who are truly in need. In this case, the Conservatives completely ignored demands that came directly from northern communities, to their detriment. The communities made specific requests and recommendations, and the Conservatives ignored them because they were contained in amendments put forward by the opposition. It is easy to see just how ridiculous this approach is.

We need to remember that the government won its majority with less than 50% of the votes. It is also important to remember that 60% of Canadians are not represented in the government's values, agenda and approach.

The government must make more room for the opposition and demands that come directly from Canadians. We are here to represent Canadians, not to advance our own personal agendas.

• (1350)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for someone who is not a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, my colleague has a very good grasp of the concerns raised by this bill. She also understands the importance of moving the bill forward. The testimony we heard has obviously created some concern about the likelihood of obtaining the funding needed to comply with the legislation.

Is my colleague worried about the fact that it will cost even more to go to court if the government does not provide the necessary funding so that these organizations can do the work they need to do?

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her comments.

Lack of funding is an issue in far too many areas, thanks to the government's approach, which is to cut funding for various organizations or offload costs onto the provinces, the territories or the organizations themselves.

And that may well happen again if the government is not able to put in place adequate funding measures. Once again, the groups, the people and the communities affected will have to try to find the money and will have to spend unimaginable amounts to guarantee their rights and interests.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River I will just let him know that I will need to interrupt him just ahead of 2 p.m., this being the time set aside for statements by members, which will begin at that time. The hon. member will have approximately seven minutes or so.

The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak now and I look forward to continuing the remainder of my part of the debate on Bill C-47 after question period.

Bill C-47 was about 15 years in the making. That does not necessarily mean those 15 years made it a perfect bill, and it is not a perfect bill.

On the other hand, Canadians expect us to put forward the absolute best legislation that we can. I like to think that we try to do that in the House. As I will speak to in a few moments, unfortunately what has transpired with respect to the progress of this bill through committee is a little disappointing.

I would first say that we put forth 50 amendments to the bill. By and large, almost all of those amendments were based on witnesses' testimony; in other words, witnesses came forward during committee stage to say what they would like to see in the bill. Unfortunately, all of the amendments were turned down by the majority government people on the committee.

They try to leave the impression that they consulted widely on this bill and on all bills. However, if we look at the record, we see that not just in this committee but in all committees they must surely be under instructions to not accept any amendments from either the Liberals or the NDP, because they simply do not get looked at in the proper light.

I think that is what has happened with this bill. While the bill does have some attributes that I will talk about in a moment, I believe it could have been made better by accepting our 50 amendments and the three amendments the Liberals put forward. That would have made the bill much better.

Amendments are always put forward in good faith. Unfortunately, in this case it was not helpful. The government turned down each and every one of them.

One of the amendments was to separate the bills. However, they have both been bundled together. One is a good-looking bill, which I will talk about in a moment; the other has some flaws that could have been fixed.

Statements by Members

The NDP believes in consultation. We believe in building consensus in decision-making. I lived and worked in the Northwest Territories for five years in the 1980s. When I moved to the Northwest Territories to work in the field of education, one of the first realizations I came to was that the Government of the Northwest Territories worked on consensus. There were no overt political parties, and people worked together, building a consensus. I would like to think that we do that in this place as much as we can.

Mr. Speaker, I neglected to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Montcalm.

Even though the government says that it consulted widely and continuously on the bill, I still believe that more consultation would have been useful.

We in the NDP stand up for the rights of northerners and all Canadians, and we continue to do that. I wish the government would join us in looking at Canada the way we do.

I will talk about the first part of the bill, which deals with the Nunavut planning and project assessment act. It is fairly straightforward.

I have a couple of good things to say about that part of the bill. There are a couple of very important measures in there that are certainly worth mentioning. One is that the roles, powers, functions and authorities of all the parties, including how their members are appointed, are very clearly defined.

● (1355)

The proposed process for impact assessment is streamlined and efficient, and hopefully this will make investments in Nunavut more attractive and profitable for people wishing to do business in Nunavut.

The act would establish timelines for various decision-making points. That is exactly the way it should be. Consultation with joint panels is also the way it should be.

The enforcement provisions in the act would establish new and more effective tools for ensuring that developers follow the terms and conditions, and there are specific monitoring plans that go along with that. These regulatory improvements are important steps in that part of the act.

After question period, Mr. Speaker, with your permission I will continue my part of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River will have four minutes remaining for his speech and the usual five minutes for questions and comments when the House next returns to debate on this question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CHILLIWACK HOSPICE SOCIETY

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to highlight the wonderful work of

the Chilliwack Hospice Society and its outgoing executive director, Geri McGrath.

Established in 1986, Chilliwack Hospice delivers a number of programs that help meet the physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs of individuals and families during the dying and grieving process.

Like most non-profits, the work of this organization depends on the efforts of dedicated volunteers. In the case of Chilliwack Hospice, they number over 200.

Under Geri's leadership, the hospice has seen a major growth in programs and services. In 2008, it provided palliative care to 30 patients, and by 2012 the number had grown to 568.

Sadly for Chilliwack, Geri has accepted a position with the Vancouver Hospice Society and will be spearheading their efforts to open their new hospice beds. Our loss is Vancouver's gain.

I would like to thank Geri McGrath, her staff and the dedicated volunteers at Chilliwack Hospice for the compassionate care they provide to my constituents in their time of greatest need.

* * *

● (1400)

[Translation]

CANADIAN SPACE AGENCY

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, later this month, Commander Chris Hadfield will be the first Canadian to take command of the international space station. He has made our country and the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert proud.

Yet he did not get there alone. Hundreds of people working for the Canadian Space Agency, most of them in Saint-Hubert, in my riding, worked very hard to make the agency's space exploration program a success.

The government decided to cut 10% from the agency's budget in 2012, which led to much uncertainty within the agency, the scientific community and the industry.

The agency and its 687 employees must be given the resources they need to make Canada an international leader in space.

* * *

[English]

ROCK THE HOUSE BONSPIEL

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to celebrate a charity event that recently took place in my riding of Simcoe—Grey.

On February 23, local business leaders and residents came together to “rock the house” in support of people with disabilities at the Curling Club of Collingwood.

Statements by Members

At this inclusive curling event, people of all abilities curled together. “Rockin’ the House” raised \$20,000, and these funds will help provide programs for people with disabilities throughout the Georgian Triangle, providing accessibility to local jobs and community activities.

I want to thank the Breaking Down Barriers chair, Ted Ashwin; bonspiel committee members Kathy Bloomfield, Martha Lawrence, Tracey MacLeod, Derek Bowers, Dave Erler, Andrea Abbott-Kokosin and Debbie Carey; and volunteers Anne Allison, Elaine Kelly and Catherine Scholtz.

The top fundraisers included Giuliano Duni, the Ainley Group, C. F. Crozier and Associates, and C.C. Tatham and Associates group.

Since 1985, Breaking Down Barriers has been providing programming and services to help promote the independence of people with disabilities. They do outstanding work.

Please join me in thanking them for their huge contribution to people with disabilities in this country.

* * *

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND FIREFIGHTERS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the hard work and dedication of local firefighters.

Recently I attended a benefit for a community member afflicted by a stroke. Over \$30,000 was raised at the event as a result of the organizational efforts of the New Glasgow Fire Department.

This is just one example of the great community service that volunteer firefighters do on Prince Edward Island.

I want to recognize all fire departments and all of the firefighters on the island who do so much for their community in many ways beyond being first responders. They and their families are to be congratulated for accepting the responsibility, taking the training and being on call at a moment's notice to attend to an accident or fire in the community.

The safety and support of those in rural communities like mine depend on these men and women who give so much of their time and effort.

On behalf of the House, I sincerely thank firefighters from across the country for their passion and dedication to safety and to their community.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to highlight an initiative that strengthens infrastructure in my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West, thus helping to create jobs and long-term prosperity for the region.

Canada's busiest highway, Highway 401, is a key economic corridor. Bridges along Highway 401 will be improved through \$7.5 million in joint funding from the provincial and federal governments.

A new bridge underpass will be built at East Townline Road in Port Hope, and rehabilitation work will be performed on the Trent River bridge in Trenton. These are but two of 44 initiatives funded through the provincial-territorial base fund through which our Conservative government is providing \$175 million and the province is providing \$173 million to strengthen infrastructure in Ontario.

I am pleased to see the Government of Canada working alongside the provincial government to improve infrastructure in Ontario, as these bridges are integral links to the long-term prosperity of the Port Hope and Trenton areas.

* * *

● (1405)

PENSIONS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the adoption of the United Nations resolution dealing with elder abuse was meant to push the government to stop violence against seniors and the theft of seniors' finances.

The Seniors Retirees Against Pension and Elder Abuse, a grassroots organization in Fort Frances, is concerned that the government, through its inaction, condones the theft of seniors' hard-earned pensions, a form of elder abuse. According to its chairman, Allan T. Bedard, Canada has not addressed the elder abuse that is created as a result of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. Pension money belongs to all those senior retirees who worked hard all their lives, ensuring their hard-earned pensions were there to help them through their retirement years. Pensions are earned and are clearly deferred wages.

Mr. Bedard and hundreds of thousands of other seniors across Canada have earned their pensions. I agree with them.

I ask my colleagues to work together to bring forward legislation now that will correct this abuse against our seniors. Together, let us make the necessary changes to the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and other relevant legislation to correct this severe injustice.

* * *

YOUNG HERO

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday I received a call from Ivan Whittaker of Williamsburg telling me about his 10-year-old neighbour, Tyler Barkley, who should be recognized as a hero in the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

That is correct; 10-year-old Tyler Barkley is responsible for saving the life of Elsie Knight. Due to his keen hearing, Tyler heard Elsie's cry for help after she had fallen outside her home and was exposed to sub-zero weather for more than 30 hours with a broken leg.

Because of his boy scout training, Tyler sprang into action and summoned his father, and together they saved Elsie.

Statements by Members

His proud parents are Rick and Carolyn Barkley. His equally proud grandparents are Rick and Greta Roberts, Sylvia Barkley and the late Ray Barkley, and I am Tyler's proud member of Parliament.

* * *

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Etobicoke Centre, St. Philip's Lutheran Church was looking to donate some space for community programs and Madbakh Women's Initiative was in search of a home to continue its great work in the Somali community, supported by Midaynta Community Services, helping families and children who receive tutoring and other important services from qualified volunteers in an after-school program.

Along with my office manager, Liz Gawur, I recognized the opportunity and introduced the parties to each other, resulting in an inspiring intercultural, interfaith partnership between St. Philip's Lutheran Church, Madbakh and Midaynta.

I congratulate Madbakh and its leader, Halima Saad, and Mahad Yusuf of Midaynta for their service to our community. I sincerely thank St. Philip's Lutheran Church, its pastor, Tuula Van Gaasbeek, and the congregation for extending hearth and home to Madbakh.

This is a brilliant example of how one community can share with another by bridging faith and by embracing our diversity, as only Canadians can and do.

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[Translation]

HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal HPS, in collaboration with Canada's various regions, helps prevent and fight homelessness.

A recent study showed that in the province of Quebec alone, over 70,000 people have benefited recently from this financial support. In Quebec City, the three new stakeholders in the Café rencontre du centre-ville have fed, counselled and supported 3,000 people. In Montreal, the Anonyme mobile intervention unit has provided education and prevention services to 1,000 men and 500 women, including a number of youths.

In my own riding of Hochelaga, the CAP Saint-Barnabé alone has renovated a rooming house for women and welcomed, fed and supported 1,800 people, and it is about to open a respite centre for homeless men and prostitutes.

The HPS is the only program to fund facilities. Its survival and enhancement are essential. The government must commit to this in its next budget.

* * *

[English]

INCOME TAX

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the strain that tax filing season can place on Canadians. This is why we have worked hard to cut red tape and improve services for Canadians.

Last year, the mail-out of income tax forms resulted in nearly 80 million pieces of paper going to waste. Canadians can appreciate that this is not a responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

Just as before, Canadians can still file using paper returns. Tax forms are available at Service Canada centres, at post offices or by phone.

I must say I am disappointed to see that the NDP is purposely trying to confuse Canadians on this issue for cheap political gains. I call on the NDP to join us in educating Canadians on the many services available to them.

If there is one thing we would expect the NDP to support, it is tax collection.

* * *

• (1410)

COMMUNITIES

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last few days for me have been an inspiring reminder of the value of strong communities. On Friday, I met with community members to discuss priorities for the upcoming budget. Whether it was John Burton from the Boys and Girls Club, Kevin Little who works with people in poverty, or Graziella Grbac from the Main Street Dartmouth Business Improvement District Association, everyone there works hard to strengthen our communities and we are grateful for them.

Then on the weekend, I saw first-hand the value of a strong community when I attended the funeral service for Joel Hopkins in Woods Harbour. The members of that community are still dealing with the grief of their tragic losses, and they are doing it together. Their collective strength was truly humbling, but not surprising because it is a very Canadian thing for community members to come together and support one another in times of need.

My job is to work hard to ensure decisions we make in this House do not weaken our communities but serve to support and strengthen them and the work they do every day.

* * *

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking action to create jobs and strengthen northern communities. We have introduced Bill C-47, the northern jobs and growth act. This act would fulfill legislative obligations flowing from land claims agreements and would contribute to improving the conditions for investment, while ensuring the north's resources are developed in a sustainable manner.

According to the president of the Mining Association of Canada,

The legislation comes at a critical time for Nunavut, with its promising mineral potential and opportunities for economic development never before seen in the territory's history.

Indeed, under the unprecedented leadership of the Prime Minister, our commitment to creating jobs for northerners and all Canadians has never before been seen in our country's history. We continue to take action to ensure that Canada's north is a prosperous region within a strong and sovereign Canada.

* * *

CAPE BRETON CENTENARIANS

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, the Cove Guest Home in my riding held a centenarian tea party in celebration of 10 residents who marked this milestone. I was honoured to attend these festivities and share the stories of their journeys over the last century.

I rise today to recognize these Cape Breton centenarians: Ethel Nicoll, Lillian MacKeigan, Mary Campbell, Harriet Dean, Charles Wall, Dinah Doucette, Jack Yazer, Mabel MacDonald, Mildred Boutillier and Beulah MacLeod.

I thank the board of directors, staff and the many volunteers of the Cove Guest Home. Since 1944, they have been providing a warm, welcoming and nurturing atmosphere for their residents. It was my pleasure to share in the celebrations last Friday, and I would like the House to join me in wishing a very happy birthday to all the recipients.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one in five Canadian jobs is generated through exports. While our government is engaged in the most ambitious pro-trade plan in Canadian history, the New Democrats are stuck in their archaic, anti-trade ideology. Here is what the NDP's trade critics have said. One former critic said he supports the efforts of big-union bosses to stop further trade negotiations with Korea, Japan and the European Union. Another described free trade agreements as "job-destroying". Yet another former trade critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, said free trade has "cost Canadians dearly".

Canadians support opening new markets to increase Canadian exports to create jobs and economic growth here at home. While the New Democrats stand consistently against all free trade deals, our Conservative government is standing up for the interests of hard-working Canadians.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, across Canada, employment insurance recipients are wondering when they will get the next knock on their door from a Service Canada investigator. Last week, leaked documents revealed that EI investigators can go so far as to ask mothers on maternity leave for proof of their delivery date. Anything goes in the name of fraud prevention.

Oral Questions

However, it is a very different story when it comes to Conservative senators. The Senate operates on an honour system. That is right; the people under investigation for residency claims and improper expenses, not to mention partisan work on the taxpayer dime, are to be trusted on their word alone.

I know Conservatives love their Senate and love packing it with their cronies. It makes me wonder who will be next in line for the gravy train. After all, B.C. has a vacant seat. Maybe the Conservatives are holding it for Christy Clark. I hear she will be looking for work soon.

* * *

• (1415)

TAXES

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006 our government has brought in countless measures to help Canadian families, including bringing in the working income tax benefit, which has helped more than one and a half million Canadians and removed one million Canadians from the tax rolls completely.

We have also provided the largest increase in GIS benefits to seniors in over a generation, removing 380,000 seniors from the tax rolls.

We have also lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%.

In contrast, the NDP voted against these measures and wants to impose higher taxes on Canadian families to pay for its risky spending plans. That party wants to impose a \$20 billion job-killing carbon tax that would raise the price of everything families pay for, including gas, groceries and electricity.

The NDP's plan to raise taxes is a bad plan. It is bad for Canadians, bad for families and bad for the economy

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the CBC obtained documents that reveal the tactics being used by inspectors against EI claimants during home visits.

Inspectors must ask questions about the identity of children and the parentage of claimants. They are also told to check claimants' bank accounts and even to comment on claimants' physical appearance.

If the Conservatives thought the long form census, which was anonymous, was too intrusive, how can they justify such an invasion of privacy?

Oral Questions

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our employment insurance system is essential to Canadians, to communities and especially to unemployed workers.

Service Canada has a duty to protect the integrity of the system, so that Canadians who pay into it can receive benefits when they need them.

The NDP is fearmongering on this issue, but all Service Canada programs and processes are meant to protect the integrity of the system so that we can keep our EI system intact.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unemployed workers get the secret police. Meanwhile, senators do not even have to say where they live.

[English]

The Auditor General revealed that when it comes to expenses, the Senate operates on the “honour system”. Senators are not required to provide any documents even as they submit claims for tens of thousands of dollars.

Why the honour system for senators and home interrogations for the unemployed?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second part of his question is, of course, not true. Hyperbole aside, the NDP leader should know better than to fearmonger about those in our society who are most vulnerable.

With regard to the Senate, yes, of course, we do believe that senator's expenses need to be appropriate. They need to be transparent and available to taxpayers. We do believe in that, and we are taking measures to ensure that those transparencies are made a reality.

Equally, we are following through on our commitment to reform the Senate to make sure that we have Senate elections and term limits for senators. If the NDP actually believes their rhetoric about modernizing the institution, they will stop blocking this legislation and move forward in a responsible way.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually, the guidebook for EI home inspectors makes it clear that they are required to demand financial records—one set of rules for the unemployed; another for their unelected, unaccountable, unapologetic senators. The Auditor General discovered that senators do not even have to provide any details to the administration in order to be reimbursed.

Why do they continue to defend Pamela Wallin, Mike Duffy and Patrick Brazeau while treating the unemployed as if they were a bunch of liars and criminals?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is funny—the same person, two different arguments. On the one hand, the leader of the NDP likes to, of course, trash individuals and an institution, but on the other hand, just last week, in this place, he tabled Bill C-476,

where the leader of the NDP actually wants to give new powers to the Senate over officers of Parliament.

If the leader of the NDP is actually serious about reforming the Senate, he would get behind our effort to have an elected Senate with senators who have term limits. He can do so in a responsible way rather than trashing individuals, and on the other hand, putting forward legislation to empower an institution that he says has had its best day behind it.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have no idea what to do about Senate reform and so have opted to let the Supreme Court of Canada deal with it.

It is a rather strange contrast nonetheless: the Prime Minister relies on an honour system for the Senate, but treats honest job-seekers like common criminals.

While we try to nail down where senators' truly live, the Conservatives might go so far as to have unemployed workers take a lie detector test.

Even Michael Fortier agrees with us that the Senate must be abolished.

When will the Conservatives do something to put an end to the wasteful spending?

[English]

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, I believe that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages already answered. We are attempting to restore democratic elections in the Senate. Those reforms are, of course, being blocked by the NDP, which allows me, now that I'm on my feet, to refer to the fact that in cultural news, the New Kids on the Block are on a reunion tour. Perhaps the member across the way, who donated 29 times to the separatists, could launch his own boy band, New Kids in the Bloc, with hit singles like “Let Me Go”, or “Gilles, It Just Hasn't Been the Same Since You've Been Gone”.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The Hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, let us not forget that the Bloc Québécois was a Conservative Party creation.

Oral Questions

When we rely on the honour system with the Conservatives, we end up with appointments such as that of Arthur Porter. The police have proof that millions of dollars earmarked for a hospital were funnelled to certain individuals. Thanks to the Conservatives, Dr. Porter was part of this corrupt scheme, which was going on while Porter was overseeing Canada's intelligence activities. At the same time, he was making cheques out to the Conservative Party. The Conservatives appointed him, even after a background check.

How did they manage to get a major criminal to oversee their intelligence at—

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*English*]

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, I find it interesting that the NDP thinks that it can speak on behalf of matters of ethics. Let us take a look at the New Democrats' illegal union money. They took some at their convention in Quebec City in 2006, in Halifax in 2009, in Vancouver in 2011. That is more paying gigs than the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay had when he was a band member. They really do know how to put the union back in reunion tour over there, do they not?

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, in his gloomy presentation to the public, the Minister of Finance said that the answer to the recipe for slow growth was going to be more public sector layoffs and more austerity. On the weekend, he said that he did not like the competition among the banks to provide lower interest rates to consumers for their mortgages.

Can someone over there explain why the government's recipe for the economy is more austerity, less competition and less of a break for consumers? Why is that the recipe?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer to the economy certainly is not the Liberals, with a question, obviously, as misguided as that.

The fact is, the Canadian economy is doing very well. If you look, in fact, at the numbers that just came out, Canada is leading the G7 in job growth. Canada is leading the G7 in economic growth. Of course, we do wish the numbers were stronger than they are, but the fact is that Canada and our government has made the right decisions that are in the interests of everyday taxpayers.

What we see across the country, in every region of this country, is that Canadians are doing better than they were before. We are moving forward. We are continuing to lower taxes. We are continuing to create jobs, and we will see our next economic action plan when we table the budget very soon.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Inspector Clouseau might as well be in charge of the Senate investigation, but Javert is the one in charge of dealing with the unemployed.

My question for the government is very simple: does it acknowledge the issues that were revealed last week? Does it accept that as a standard for Canadians and Canadian democracy?

• (1425)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the way we are protecting our employment insurance system is nothing new. It was created in 1993. It is the old system that the Liberal Party put in place to protect our employment insurance system when it was in power.

In light of the current economic climate, we are protecting the integrity of the system and investing in our communities for the people who need this system and this assistance.

* * *

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, another clear example of the double standard is with respect to the lack of security clearances for people serving the population of Canada. We not only have the case of Dr. Porter, who said that he did not have an extensive security clearance. We also have the cases of Bruce Carson and the appointment of Senator Brazeau. This was not the case prior to 2006. I can speak personally about two top security clearances in 1998 and 2005.

Why did the government loosen the standard with respect to security clearance for some of the most important and significant jobs serving the Canadian public?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it simply is not true. We have not loosened them. We have actually, in fact, strengthened the standards, because we understand that these positions are—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor now.

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the allegations are, of course, entirely false. With regard specifically to Mr. Porter, of course, the allegations against Mr. Porter have nothing to do with the time in which he was a federal government appointee, and he left that post some time ago.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now we have Senator Boisvenu, the latest senator to declare that gouging thousands of taxpayer dollars in a housing allowance is nobody's business. Just like Wallin or Duffy, we are supposed to just trust him. Really?

There is no institution in this world that pays out thousands of dollars based on your word without any documentation or receipts. Do they really think the honour systems cuts it when we are talking about the Senate? Are Patrick Brazeau or Pamela Wallin doing a pinkie swear as enough of a standard of accountability for this government?

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, it is ironic that they choose that particular member to speak on their behalf on ethical issues, when it was just this month that he was singled out for gerrymandering the electoral redistribution process. He is one of only two MPs in all of Canada who the independent commission took the unprecedented step to single out for inappropriate conduct. Perhaps the first thing he could do before asking questions of ethics is to stand in the House and apologize to his constituents and to Parliament.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will give the hon. member a map of northern Ontario and invite him to come up and see what real constituents are like.

This is a government that promised Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I know the wounds are starting to hurt them from the lack of accountability and from the fact that the Prime Minister promised Canadians that he would clean up the Senate and he would end the cesspool in Ottawa. What did he give us? He hired jailbird Bruce Carson to his inner circle. He gave us the \$7-million Patrick Brazeau. Now we have Arthur Porter on the run from the cops internationally, and people are asking how he got to the top position of the Security Intelligence Review Committee.

This is about the judgment of the Prime Minister. What happened to that zealot who promised that he was going to clean up this place?

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, now we have a little window into the NDP member's thinking. He says that constituents in my community are not "real constituents".

He would know a little better about the real people on the ground if he actually listened to the people to whom he made the promise that he would scrap the \$1 billion long gun registry, the real constituents he looked in the eye election after election, the hard-working hunters and farmers who have upheld the generations-long tradition of hunting and trapping that go back to our aboriginal people. Those are the real people of Canada to whom he should be listening.

[*Translation*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, partisan appointments do nothing more than reward party cronies at Canadians' expense. In exchange, these cronies must be at the government's beck and call.

The Prime Minister is using his Senate to put a stop to the legal proceedings initiated by Kevin Page.

The Senate, which is not accountable to anyone, does not want Kevin Page to get the documents he needs to do his job.

Why are the Conservatives using the Senate to strong-arm Kevin Page?

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that particular individual's term is nearly up. What I can tell the hon. member is that there is a process in place that is designed to find a credible, non-partisan replacement for that particular individual. That process is taking place at this 100-plus-year-old institution called the Library of Parliament. We expect that process to continue, and we will respect that process.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while Conservatives defend Senate entitlements, it is the NDP that is looking after Canadians taxpayers.

The deputy leader of the government in the Senate claims that Page is overstepping his mandate when he helps MPs with fiscal oversight. Kevin Page's legal case is all about ensuring fiscal accountability, but the Senate is threatening to shut the Parliamentary Budget Officer down.

What will the government do to stand up for taxpayers and stop this undemocratic charade, and will the government call off its senators?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker I am somewhat taken aback. The hon. member stands in her place, claiming to be for the taxpayers. The NDP voted just last week for a \$5.5-billion hike in spending by the government, on top of \$56 billion of promises last year, on top of a \$21-billion carbon tax hike. The NDP cannot speak for the taxpayers ever.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the senators are the ones who should be out of a job, not Kevin Page.

Oral Questions

Last week, we received leaked documents that detailed the intrusive questions asked by inspectors during home visits.

It was like reading an interrogation manual. Employment insurance claimants are presumed guilty of fraud and have no way of proving their innocence.

Why does the Prime Minister not take the unemployed at their word, as he does senators? Why the double standard?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Service Canada is responsible for protecting the system's integrity so that Canadians who pay their premiums can receive benefits when they need them.

The department successfully stopped half a billion dollars' worth of ineligible payments last year.

However, the employment insurance system still lost hundreds of millions of dollars to fraud.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister is more interested in intimidating Canadians than she is in helping them get the services they need. The government's own documents show a \$36 million cut to citizen-centred services, but its infamous pokey police are getting a whopping \$35 million budget increase.

Just like her talking points, the minister's priorities are all wrong. If she is serious about weeding out ineligible claims, why will she not reinvest in the services that help Canadians and support the front-line workers who help Canadians fill out the forms correctly in the first place?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Service Canada has a responsibility to find and to stop inappropriate claims so that Canadians who have paid into the EI system have the benefits available to them when they need them. The department has in fact stopped almost \$500,000 in inadmissible claims over the last year. Despite that, hundreds of millions of dollars were still lost to fraud.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us be fair. I am sure the Conservatives would send inspectors to the doorsteps of senators, if they could find out where they live.

Under the Conservative watch, we have seen 27,000 jobs lost in Ontario's forestry sector, mill after mill shut down in northern Ontario, but instead of asking how can we help, Conservatives send out Service Canada employees with a clipboard and a quota.

It's a very simple question. Why have Conservatives abandoned our industries, abandoned our workers and abandoned our region?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to our economic action plan, 900,000 net new jobs have been created across this country since the depths of the recession. We have made changes so that we can better support workers who have lost their jobs, through no fault of their own, to get back into the labour market. We want to make sure that Canadians understand that when they need it, employment insurance will be there for them.

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, either the minister is talking nonsense or she does not understand her own reform.

People all over eastern Quebec are angry about the uncertainty created by the Conservative government's policy of abandoning the regions.

We have lost count of this government's underhanded attacks on the regions: gutting employment insurance, abandoning the forestry industry, closing regional post offices and slashing VIA Rail's budget.

Why does the government keep attacking our regional economies? Why do the Conservatives want to suck the life out of the regions?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, more than 980 forestry businesses have received support from EDC.

I would also like to remind the member that federal transfers to Quebec have increased by 44%, and that does not include the Old Harry offshore oil and natural gas initiative. That is regional economic development, just as we promised. We are getting results.

And then there are the NDP, who vote against nearly every economic stimulus measure that we put forward in the House of Commons.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the Conservatives promised to give more power to the regions, but over the past two years of Conservative rule, the powers that be have abandoned the regions.

The Conservatives seem to have no problem giving generously to big corporations and banks, but they are incapable of doing anything whatsoever to help our regions recover from the crisis.

I have serious concerns about the government's priorities when it says one thing then immediately does another.

The regions are key to our identity. Will this government make them a top priority once again?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the regions are this government's priority. Once again, we have taken unprecedented measures. We have given \$2 billion back to municipalities through the gas tax fund. We have made that permanent. It is the law.

We are working for Quebec and, unlike the virtually invisible NDP members, we have implemented economic development measures. The NDP slogan in Quebec is more like "our region on the scrap heap".

Oral Questions

We will continue to implement positive economic measures without raising taxes.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government may not listen to workers or employers, but will it at least listen to Conservatives?

More and more of them are condemning the job-killing employment insurance reform. The long list includes Allen Cormier, Conservative candidate in the most recent election in Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia; Michel-Éric Castonguay, Conservative candidate in the most recent election in Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord; André Plourde, former Conservative MP for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our employment insurance system provides financial support to people who have lost their jobs, while they are looking for work. We have expanded the program to provide more support to those people and to help them find work. If there are no jobs in their field or in their region, employment insurance will be there for them as always.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative attack on unemployed workers has changed from legitimate investigation to deliberate intimidation. Past practice was that there would be home visits only for flagged files. The change to random visits is a whole new level of mistrust, yet the minister contends that it is just business as usual.

I ask for one simple, truthful answer. Are these random visits new? I am going to provide a clue. It is a three-letter word that starts with *y* and ends with “mess”.

• (1440)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Service Canada has a responsibility to find and stop inappropriate claims and to protect the funds that Canadians have paid into the system, whether they are employers or employees, and to protect the integrity of the employment insurance system so that people can access the benefits when they need them.

Last year, the employment insurance program lost hundreds of millions of dollars due to inadmissible claims.

* * *

POVERTY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the UN's right to food envoy confirmed today that poverty and food insecurity are a growing problem in Canada. In their election platform, the Conservatives promised a national food policy to address this insecurity. Two years later, there's not a whisper of a plan. In fact, the Conservatives have gutted measures and help for the most vulnerable by eliminating the long form census and dismantling the Canadian Council of Welfare.

Why is the government determined to make this unfortunate inequality even worse?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, implementing the recommendation in the report would have a devastating impact on Canadians, including a \$48 billion tax hike.

I met with the UN rapporteur last year and was very surprised at how ill-informed he is about Canada and the programs that we have in Canada for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has roundly criticized the Conservatives for their incompetence. We know that the Conservatives ignore the problems of malnutrition and health, but now we have learned that by eliminating the long form census they have made the problem worse.

Why are they refusing to create a national strategy to ensure that all Canadians have access to nutritious and affordable food? Why have they eliminated the tools to make this possible?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, implementing the recommendations coming from the UN rapporteur would have a significant impact on all Canadians, with a \$48 billion tax hike. That is the same member who made a recommendation that we should be reducing health transfers to provinces and territories. I will not accept the report from a UN rapporteur who studies from afar. The recommendations would not be affordable for Canadians.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what a typical response.

An international expert reports on a real problem in our communities, and the Conservatives respond by attacking the messenger. A serious government would recognize that 800,000 Canadians depend on food banks every month. A serious government would listen to UN concerns about nutrition, especially for children.

When will the Conservatives stop ignoring these problems and bring in measures to ensure good nutrition and to end hunger in this country?

Oral Questions

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the same member who wants to create a massive new bureaucracy called the sodium registry. Those members want to force every family bakery, every family restaurant, to register with the government how much salt they put in their foods. Canadians do not want bureaucracy; they want choices. That is why our focus is on providing Canadians with the information they need to make healthy decisions for their families.

This just goes to show, again, how out of touch the NDP is with Canadians. The NDP's priorities are soft on crime and hard—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Welland.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of baseless response we would expect from the Conservative government. The Conservatives ignore the truth and attack the messenger, regardless of who it is.

Since 1988, the number of farmers under the age of 35 has dropped by over 70%. Without young farmers to take over, Canada is facing a crisis in agriculture, and Conservatives are sitting on their hands. The Conservatives' inaction and lack of vision is making this problem worse.

Where is the plan to reverse this dramatic decline in young farmers across this great country?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the exact opposite is true. Our agricultural policies are helping farmers to thrive. Let me provide some information from farm financial reports. The net cash income for Canadian farmers will increase by 14% in 2012, to reach a record of \$13.1 billion, the highest level in nearly 40 years.

Young farmers want to know that they can raise their families on the farm, and under our agricultural policies, they can.

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while they spout nonsense and say anything at all, they are ignoring the crisis taking shape right before their eyes.

The reality is that the number of young farmers has dropped drastically: more than 50% of Canadian farmers are over 55 years old. In the next 15 years, there will be a massive transfer of farm assets from the baby boom generation to the new generation of farmers.

When will the Conservatives take this situation seriously and propose policies to help the next generation of farmers?

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the one main concern of young farmers is whether they can earn enough money on the farm to raise their families. As I mentioned, the net cash income for Canadian farmers will increase by 14% in 2012, the highest level in 40 years.

One policy that we will absolutely not implement is a \$21 billion carbon tax that would dramatically affect farmers, both young and old.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that they can count on this government to give police the tools they need to do their job. This is true in all communities across Canada, including aboriginal communities.

Our government has stood up for matrimonial real property rights, tougher sentences for dangerous criminals and funding to keep young people out of gangs. Policing is also an important tool for keeping communities safe.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the future of the first nations policing program?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member, who is an 18-year veteran of the RCMP, for his service and for asking the question.

Our government is committed to keeping our streets and communities safe. That is why I am proud to announce today that our Conservative government is renewing its commitment to first nations policing. We will provide stable, long-term funding over the next five years. In fact, this is the largest investment in the history of this program and a significant increase from the previous Liberal government. This initiative is keeping our streets and communities safe.

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[*Translation*]

VETERANS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the more days go by, the harder it is for the Conservatives to protect the privacy of veterans. The Conservatives refuse to take this problem seriously, even though the number of privacy breaches has grown. The most recent case is that of a veteran who requested a copy of his file and received the files of two other veterans. It is about time that the Conservatives begin taking seriously the breaches of our veterans' privacy.

Why is this happening time and again under this minister?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to remind the House that we take the confidentiality of veterans' files very seriously. I would like to read a quote:

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Veterans Affairs Canada has sent a clear signal that privacy is vital to its operations....the Department is moving from reacting to privacy issues to proactively addressing them.

[Translation]

Who did I quote? The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

We will continue to protect our veterans' privacy.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to offer sincere condolences for the police officer who was killed in Kuujuaq and to the other officer who was shot. Hopefully he will recover very soon.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage is aware of my question. Richard Caissie of Courtenay, B.C., a CF veteran, asked for his personal medical files and said that he received two personal medical files of two other veterans.

When will Richard Caissie receive his files, because he has not yet received them? Will the minister apologize for that error, and what about protecting the privacy of all our veterans and military personnel in our country?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I certainly join the member opposite in expressing his condolences for the lost life. We certainly share his sentiments in that regard.

With regard to Mr. Caissie, I thank my colleague for his notice on this question. He should know that I did contact Daniel Caron, the head of Library and Archives Canada, who is looking into this matter. Hopefully Mr. Caissie will get his information by the end of the day today. We will look into why false information was sent, because clearly is something that should never happen.

* * *

● (1450)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last July the European Parliament rejected the anti-counterfeiting trade agreement over serious concerns about the regressive changes it would impose on intellectual property in the digital age, yet on Friday, the Conservatives introduced a bill in the House that would pave the way for the ACTA without question.

Canadians have concerns about goods being seized or destroyed without any oversight by the courts.

Will the minister now be clear with Canadians? Are the Conservatives planning to ratify ACTA, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very happy to have introduced an anti-counterfeiting bill in the House. Counterfeiting is a growing problem in Canada.

Counterfeiting deceives Canadians and is linked to security-related issues. So it was our duty to modernize the legislation to

ensure that we can end counterfeiting, so that Canadians are not deceived, and to provide better security.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a number of countries have rejected this unacceptable agreement. The anti-counterfeiting trade agreement—ACTA—was drafted behind closed doors and would incriminate the daily users of cultural content. This agreement will turn our border officers into instant copyright experts, without the adequate legal support.

Canada must seriously study the problem of counterfeiting. However, the failure of Bill C-30 means that Canadians do not have faith in this Conservative government.

Is Bill C-56 not simply a way to support ACTA through the back door?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear: Bill C-56 is a way to support and protect Canadian families.

Counterfeiting is a growing problem that must be stopped. Counterfeiting deceives Canadians and poses risks to the safety of Canadians. We must ensure that the legislation is updated and appropriate in order to equip the authorities with effective tools to fight counterfeiting, which is exactly what was introduced on Friday. If the NDP is responsible, I hope they will support us.

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*[English]***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the Liberal government allocated some \$69 million to reduce processing times for citizenship applications. Today, under the Conservative government, the processing time has increased and waiting times are over four, five, six years and beyond. Now there is a record high of over 300,000 residents waiting for their citizenship applications to be processed.

The Conservative record is a disgrace. When will the minister finally focus on his job and take concrete actions to decrease the processing times for citizenship applications?

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should actually proud that there is such a high demand for Canadian citizenship. After all, who would not want to be a citizen of the greatest country in the world.

Part of the increase in wait times has resulted from the fact that our government has maintained and sustained the highest levels of immigration in Canadian history. We welcome approximately 30,000 more newcomers each year than that administration did when it was government.

We will not take any lessons from the Liberals on how to manage an immigration system. They left wait times, whichever category anyone wants to pick, a lot longer than it ever should have been, and we are fixing it.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 2013 is a crucial year for Canada and the Arctic. We will be making an important submission under the law of the sea for extended jurisdiction of the continental shelf. However, Canadians have heard nothing from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of the Environment and even the Minister for the Arctic Council.

With deadlines looming, when will Conservatives present to Canadians the details of their plan, or do they want to continue to keep Canadians in the dark?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is, when we are concerned about the north and the Arctic, that no government in the history of our country has ever done as much for the Arctic and northern Canada.

Right today, we have in front of the House a bill which I encourage all members to pass. That will create jobs and new opportunities in the arctic and northern Canada.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend a ship ran aground in English Bay near Vancouver. If the Kitsilano base were still open, the Coast Guard could have responded in a matter of minutes, but instead the response time from Sea Island was over half an hour.

British Columbians are concerned about the closure of Vancouver's only Coast Guard station, but the Conservative government is not listening. When are the Conservatives going to acknowledge they are putting lives at risk? When will the Conservatives reopen the Kitsilano Coast Guard station?

• (1455)

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is totally wrong, again. The incident in question actually had a response of 11 minutes by SAR in Vancouver, an excellent service that is impeccable.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is we were lucky no one was hurt this weekend. The situation is only going to get worse this summer when our coast is full of kids learning to sail, families on vacation and more marine traffic.

Sea Island took 31 minutes, not 11 minutes, to respond in English Bay. If this accident had occurred in Burrard Inlet, it would have taken an hour or more.

When is the government going to stop ignoring the police, the fire chief, British Columbians and reverse this reckless and dangerous move?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite is totally incorrect. The response time by the Royal Canadian Marine SAR was 11 minutes. It took 35 minutes for Sea Island to respond, but SAR was on location in 11 minutes.

In another incident that took place today, the response time was 10 minutes.

Oral Questions

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the mining sector is a critical sector of Canada's economy, creating jobs and economic growth from coast to coast to coast.

Yesterday I was proud to join over 40 of my Conservative colleagues at the PDAC conference in Toronto to hear about the over 200 active mines in Canada, producing more than 60 minerals and metals, which help fund social programs from health care to education. Last year, over \$7.1 billion was paid to governments across Canada in royalties and taxes.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain to the House what our government is doing to support this important sector?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Westlock—St. Paul for his ongoing work with the mining sector.

Today the Minister of Natural Resources is speaking to the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada conference about Canada's open, transparent and efficient environment for mining investment. The PDAC conference is the largest in the world and it showcases Canada's international strength in mining.

Through our responsible resource development initiative, low corporate taxes and red tape reduction initiatives, our government is creating jobs and economic growth across Canada in mining communities.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget, the government said that it would sell off the federal tree farm, which has been operating with great success at Indian Head, Saskatchewan, for 111 years.

Many people believe the decision to get rid of it is wrong. At the very least, the former employees of the tree farm, the community and the rural municipality of Indian Head and the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan are asking the government to suspend any sell-off plans for at least one year to allow a local producer-based alternative to be developed.

Will the government give them that time?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, PFRA was established in the 1930s to take care of environmental issues at that time. It has done a good job over the years, but for the most part, those initiatives have been taken care of and corrected. There actually is no need for the continuation of the tree farm in western Canada.

Oral Questions

The government looks forward to turning it over to private interests, if private interests are in favour of taking it over.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the National Gallery is being forced to pay for the Conservatives' new Canadian Museum of History. While millions of dollars are being invested in changing the name of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 29 positions are being cut at the National Gallery. These 29 jobs will be lost in the library, in information technology and in graphic design. Because the roof is leaking, the gallery has to cut staff in charge of the website and information technology.

Instead of investing millions to change the role of the most popular museum in the country, why will the minister not invest in existing museum infrastructure, which needs immediate attention?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not true. In our budget of last year, our government made a number of decisions with regard to culture.

When it comes to all of our national museums, we did not cut a dime from any one of them, including the National Gallery. For him to suggest in the House that they are having challenges because of the government is not true. In fact, this is what the press release from the National Gallery said:

• (1500)

[Translation]

Visitors to the Gallery...will see no diminishment in the services delivered...

This decision was not made by the government. It was made internally.

[English]

We have made decisions as a government to increase funding for all of our national museums, to create two new national museums at Pier 21 and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

We are proud of our record, and the Canadian Museum of History will be a great success.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated an unprecedented commitment toward Canada's north and to northerners for seven consecutive years.

Just this past weekend, over 40 Conservative MPs, led by the member for Westlock—St. Paul, visited the PDAC convention in Toronto. The mining industry serves to increase opportunity to aboriginal Canadians as it is currently the the largest private sector employer of this important group.

The Mining Association of Canada estimates that potential developments in the north could draw more than \$8 billion in investment and create more than 4,000 jobs in the next decade.

Could the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development please update the House on further steps we are taking to unlock the economic potential of Canada's north?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I referred to earlier, we have introduced the northern jobs and growth act, which will create jobs in mining, oil, gas, transportation and other business sectors in the north, and indeed across all of Canada.

I would like to quote Jane Groenewegen, a member of the legislative assembly of the Northwest Territories, who says this about the act, "good on the federal government for finally figuring out a way to streamline this and let's get on with business". We agree with her. Let us get on with business. Let us pass this act.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' reorganization of Canada Post is not working. More and more sorting centres and post offices are closing, while hours of operation are constantly being reduced, but that is not all. After having a labour contract imposed on them, employees are being forced to work 10 to 12 hours a day. Some workers are on the brink of exhaustion and others simply want to resign.

How much longer will the Conservatives allow working conditions to deteriorate? When will they finally decide to do something about the situation? And they better not say it is not their fault, because they were the first to jump on it when special legislation was introduced.

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is a crown corporation and is at arm's length from government. It makes its own decisions on operations and so on. However, we have imposed on Canada Post a moratorium on the closure of rural post offices, and we are working hard to ensure that Canada Post has a sustainable future.

Members of that party have done everything to undermine the mail service in the country. They should be ashamed.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, every day, more and more people are mobilizing against the EI reform. The federal government's contempt for the representatives from the regions has only fueled the fire.

Today, representatives of workers and unemployed workers announced the creation of a Quebec coalition against employment insurance reform. This coalition feels that Ottawa is refusing to consider the disastrous consequences that this reform will have for Quebec's economy.

Will the minister come down from her ivory tower and look at the adverse effects that her new reform and measures will have, and cancel the reform?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the employment insurance system that is there to provide financial support to people who have lost their job while they are looking for a new one.

I can assure you that EI benefits will be there for people who cannot find another job, as always.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, the Minister of Industry accused local leaders of spreading misinformation about the EI reform. He has no shame.

This is the same minister who suggested that the system was not viable, while the government was helping itself to billions of dollars from the surplus. He is also the one who claims that the reform is meant to target fraudsters. If we want to target school dropouts, we do not get rid of schools. Employment insurance is no different.

Instead of making wild accusations, will the minister simply tell the truth: that this reform is shoddy and will penalize the unemployed, families and the economy of the regions?

• (1505)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, employment insurance is there to provide financial support to people who have lost their job while they are looking for a new one.

If there is no position is available in their region and in their area of expertise, employment insurance will be there for Canadians, as always.

[English]

The Speaker: I understand there have been consultations among House leaders, and I would invite hon. members to rise and observe a moment of silence for the officer slain in Kuujuaq.

[A moment of silence observed]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

[English]

In accordance with its order of reference of Monday, February 25, 2013, the committee has considered votes 1c, 5c, 20c and 25c under

Routine Proceedings

Agriculture and Agri-Food in the supplementary estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, and reports the same.

Again I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 8th report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. In accordance with its order of reference of Monday, February 25, 2013, the committee has considered votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 under Agriculture and Agri-Food in the main estimates for the fiscal year 2013-14, and reports the same.

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PETITIONS

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a number of petitions from the people of Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon stating that the House condemn discrimination against females occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination.

HEAD INJURIES

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, helmets can prevent serious injuries and save lives. If consumers do not know that helmets actually do not provide the protection they think they are providing, that can be harmful to the consumer.

I have a petition today handed to me by a constituent that asks for the Government of Canada to amend the Hazardous Products Act so that all recreational sports helmets must meet the Canadian Standards Association standard CSA-Z263.1.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to present a petition on behalf of my constituents of Red Deer and surrounding area expressing their strong support for Motion No. 408.

• (1510)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present two petitions signed by residents of the province of New Brunswick from my constituency and from a number of others. The petitions express serious concerns about the government's changes to employment insurance. These changes would be very negative for those who work in seasonal industries, and they are calling on the government to change these regressive measures immediately.

Government Orders

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

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

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

[Translation]

LYME DISEASE

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

The first pertains to Lyme disease. I had the great honour of introducing Bill C-442 about this disease. The petitioners are asking all parties in the House of Commons to support this bill.

[English]

SHARK FINNING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition deals with the global problem of extinction threatening many different species of sharks, particularly through one dish: shark fin soup. These petitioners from the Victoria area ask the House to take action and pass the private member's bill that would restrict access to shark fins throughout Canada.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure I provide a petition today from residents of Manitoba who have signed a petition in regard to concerns with lakes such as Lake Winnipeg, Shoal Lake and others. The petitioners are calling for the government to reverse its decision to close the ELA research station. They recognize Canada's Experimental Lakes Area is a unique world-renowned facility for freshwater research and education, and the petitioners would like to see the decision to close it reversed.

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to present a petition signed by residents of Abitibi regarding the Conservatives' decision to increase the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. The petitioners are calling on the government to keep the age of eligibility for these benefits at 65 and to make the necessary investments in the guaranteed income supplement program in order to help lift the seniors of this country out of poverty.

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

NORTHERN JOBS AND GROWTH ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-47, An Act to enact the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to continue my comments in this debate. Just before question period, in the first part of my discussion, I was talking about one part of the bill that actually works quite well and would certainly be particularly good for Nunavut. However, let me take a few moments to speak about the Northwest Territories surface rights board act. There are some difficulties there.

I would like to reiterate that Canadians expect us to work together in this place. When amendments come forward, Canadians expect them all to be considered, regardless of where they come from, whether from the government or the opposition. Unfortunately, right across all the Conservative-dominated committees, without exception, they have all been rejected outright. That is sad for democracy, because here we have a bill that has been 15 years in the making and we have a real opportunity to make it not just a good bill but a perfect bill.

One of the big concerns I have is with the preamble, which says the Inuvialuit final agreement provides for a surface rights board, but it is not clear anywhere in the bill where that actually exists. It says it in the preamble, but not in the bill. That could be problematic going forward.

Additionally, there is no provision for a surface rights board in the Salt River First Nation treaty settlement agreement. Further complicating the issue is the unsettled land claims of the Dehcho and Akaitcho First Nations. What will happen is that all the lawyers will be in court some time soon after the act is implemented because there will be some confusion.

It is most unfortunate that we could have a perfect bill if the government had considered even some of our amendments. However, it would not do it. It would make mining more responsible in northern Ontario if some of our amendments had been accepted.

Government Orders

The other part of the bill that has me concerned is the whole concept of sustainable training. Education and skills development are critical in all of these large projects. I refer to northern Ontario and some of the issues that we have had in the Ring of Fire and some of the other mining developments that are struggling to go forward. Chiefs have been very clear to me that they do not want one-year or year-and-a-half construction jobs for people from their first nations, and then nothing and they are out in the cold. What they want is real training with real, long-term sustainable results for their people. That means things like people being trained as tradesmen and journeymen electricians, carpenters and plumbers.

They are concerned about what happens when the projects end, and almost all of these mining projects do end, whether in five years, 10 years or 20 years. They want to ensure that the people in their communities have the ability to be mobile, that they have skills they can use any place across Canada and can still, in essence, support their communities and come back and visit and perhaps live there full time some day.

As we heard in question period, we are talking about \$8 billion of potential investment and some 4,500 new jobs. It is important that there be something in the bill concerning sustainable skills and skills development that really spells out what the responsibilities are.

The member for Western Arctic, in his comments, was very concerned that the NWT surface rights board act may have been rushed and that perhaps not enough time was taken to talk about it.

• (1515)

We put forward the amendments from witnesses to try to clear this whole thing up, and none of them were accepted, so while this bill would be a step forward, it could have been better. I keep on mentioning that because I would like to see us moving forward in the next couple of years, particularly when government bills come forward, to have the opportunity to bring forward amendments and have them considered in the light in which they are brought forward.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend from northern Ontario has raised two fundamental concerns that apply not just to this one piece of legislation but across the current government's broad policy, particularly when dealing with rural, remote and northern areas and the implications around first nations consultation and accommodation.

There are two concerns. One is that we have seen, not just with bills that deal with first nations but across the board, that at every committee from transport to first nations to the environment, when we as the official opposition bring some amendments that are garnered out of the testimony from people who would be impacted by the bill and who are experts in that field, on every single occasion the government members vote down those amendments.

At some point we have to wonder if they believe the legislation they introduce is perfect and drawn up without a mistake, without a comma or a period out of place. Of course members of no government—this one, or any other—could be possibly be so arrogant as to think that when they draw up sometimes complex pieces of legislation, they got it exactly right the first time. The whole process that we go through and the reason this place exists is to hold government to account and ensure we get legislation right.

That is the first point: that yet again on this bill the member for Western Arctic and others took the testimony, actually listened and tried to modify the bill.

My question is on the second piece. When dealing with first nations, a big question is around certainty, whether it is the Ring of Fire, in northern B.C. or here in the western Arctic that we are talking about. Having good agreements based on consultation and accommodation is what allows industry and those communities the certainty they need to build that progressive and brighter future.

Can my friend comment on his experiences in northern Ontario as they relate to this bill and the Conservatives' lack of understanding or capacity to listen and consult and at the end of the day to finally accommodate?

• (1520)

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows in this place, and certainly in northern Ontario, the government has put the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka forward to try to move the Ring of Fire along. He will know, as will people in northern Ontario, that perhaps the main reason it is not moving along is there has not been the consultation that first nations people expect and deserve, and I know that the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka will do his best to ensure that happens.

In reference to this bill, it has been in the works for 15 years, approaching a couple of decades. This refers to the first part of the comment from the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. There really is an opportunity to put forward perfect or near-perfect legislation. After that period, one would think that the Conservatives would be interested in what the witnesses have to say when they go to committee. One would think that they would take everything that they have to say under proper advisement to ensure that they put forward the absolute best bill that they possibly can.

It is almost as if they go for 15 years, building up and building up, and then in the final hour they just say, "Oh well, let's go with what we got", instead of going that extra little mile and saying, "Maybe there are some good amendments here; maybe we should look at these; maybe we can make this a better bill".

Quite frankly, that is what Canadians expect from us.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my comment for the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River is in absolute support of what he has just said.

Government Orders

I had the pleasure, and it was a pleasure, of working for the then Minister of the Environment from 1986 to 1988 and putting legislation forward as part of a majority government, putting forward legislation to committees where we welcomed changes. As an example, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act was put forward without a priority substances list. The idea of a priority substances list came from an opposition member of Parliament on a parliamentary committee for environment. My boss, the Minister of the Environment, Tom McMillan, saw that it would be a benefit and would improve the act. This was a normal occurrence.

Parliamentary committees studying legislation used to be essentially non-politicized zones. We went in there, set our partisanship at the door and worked to make a better bill. I mourn that this is lost now. The comments that the member is making on this specific bill apply to every piece of legislation we have seen go through this House. Every piece of legislation in this place is treated as though accepting a single amendment to any government bill is a political defeat that the administration today will not tolerate. That is an offence to democracy, and I appreciate the member's mentioning it.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. She is absolutely right. That is the feeling that we in the opposition get in committee. We know that these are worthwhile amendments and we wonder why the Conservatives consider that it would be some sort of defeat if they were to accept any of them. Perhaps the Ottawa bubble syndrome causes them to think that for some reason they would lose votes.

I do not know what they are thinking, but the thinking should be that we go through all of the controls to make sure that we come forward with the best legislation possible.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, we are debating Bill C-47, An Act to enact the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts. This bill seeks to create a framework for determining how environmental assessments and project approval will be done in Nunavut given the new land use plans.

Through these amendments, the bill also seeks to improve the process and make it more efficient in order to support economic growth in northern Canada.

The bill involves two acts, and we are of the opinion that these two acts should have been examined separately. Including different implementation provisions in a single bill was clearly not the best thing to do. Unfortunately, the government decided otherwise, despite the fact that we proposed that the bill be divided in two.

The NDP supports consultation and consensus-based decision-making that respects the autonomy of the Government of Nunavut and the Government of the Northwest Territories.

However, we think that there should have been more consultation about the Northwest Territories surface rights board act. We will certainly continue to fight for the rights and interests of northern

residents, and we will promote the sustainable development of northern communities.

I will now turn to some highlights of the two parts of the bill.

The first part of the bill, the Nunavut planning and project assessment act, creates a framework for planning and project assessment in the territory. This part of the bill requires the Government of Canada and the Inuit to create a joint system to supervise resource management in Nunavut. It sets out an apparently simple and effective impact assessment process, particularly for small projects. The goal is to make investment in Nunavut more attractive and profitable in the future.

The bill calls for a regulatory framework that will be more effective and regular, with timelines for territorial planning and environmental assessment processes.

The bill also makes it possible for transboundary and trans-regional projects to be assessed by joint committees, and the environmental assessment criteria have been harmonized.

The bill includes provisions for new and better tools to ensure that investors respect the conditions set out by the Nunavut Impact Review Board. It sets out general and specific monitoring programs, which will authorize both governments to monitor the environmental, social and economic impacts of projects.

The bill also defines how, and by whom, land use plans will be prepared, amended, reviewed and implemented in Nunavut. This will improve the regulatory regime to give the people of Nunavut the power to decide how quickly and to what extent territorial lands and resources will be developed.

The second part of the bill pertains to the Northwest Territories surface rights board act, which will give the board the power to make orders regarding terms and conditions of access and compensation to be paid in respect of that access when the parties are unable to negotiate an agreement.

As such, it affects the entire Northwest Territories and implements provisions of land claim agreements. Only some of the land claim agreements in the territory contain a provision for a surface rights board.

There is no provision in the Salt River First Nation Treaty Settlement Agreement for the creation of a surface rights board. Furthermore, this issue also includes unresolved land claims.

Lastly, the bill would also make changes to the Yukon Surface Rights Board Act, the purpose of which is to fulfill the federal government's obligation under the Yukon umbrella final agreement to establish a dispute settlement process for parties that have land and surface interests.

• (1530)

This has a lot to do with disputes related to access to and use of first nations land in Yukon.

Government Orders

That said, this bill could stimulate the development of responsible mining projects in Nunavut, where one already exists. This is a good sign for Nunavut, which currently has some exciting mining potential. We are talking about \$8 billion in investments, which could help create nearly 4,500 jobs. Nunavut's GDP has increased by 12% since 2010.

The bill sets out a framework for determining how environmental assessments will be carried out and how permits will be issued in Nunavut. This new regulatory regime will help maintain economic competitiveness through new mining investments and will also be there to ensure that projects go through a rigorous assessment process.

By promoting new investments in Nunavut, this bill will help ease the uncertainty in the industry. Furthermore, it will now officially be necessary to obtain environmental assessment approval before starting development work.

This bill could clarify the rules on land use and environmental assessments, particularly when the designated Inuit organization is given the power to authorize new land use plans. This is a crucial aspect to take into account when debating this bill. We must absolutely ensure that development in the north benefits residents in the north.

Some important questions remain. The bill includes regions where land claims are still in dispute, which could result in legal proceedings.

Furthermore, the creation of a surface rights board has raised some concerns in many cases. This was the case with the Gwich'in Tribal Council, whose chief has indicated that the Gwich'in were not able to participate in creating a surface rights board in any meaningful way, since they had to deal with changes in the region.

We presented 50 amendments to this bill at committee stage. Unfortunately, they were all rejected or deemed out of order. Quite simply, the Conservatives were not interested in the amendments we wanted made to the bill. The amendments were perfectly legitimate and based on requests from witnesses from the Nunavut Impact Review Board, Nunavut Tuungavik Inc., the NWT Association of communities, the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Nunavut Chamber of Mines, and Alternatives North.

With those amendments, we tried to modify the provisions of the bill that enable the commission to prohibit access and that give it authority over lands subject to outstanding land claims.

Therefore, we support the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act, which will apply part of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. However, we do not want to interfere in an agreement that the Government of Nunavut negotiated.

We also fear that the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act was drafted in haste. To compensate, we proposed numerous amendments to properly represent the witnesses' concerns. It was all to no avail because the Conservatives rejected every last one. I find it hard to believe that, out of 50 amendments, none of them had anything special to contribute to this bill.

So I would like to reiterate the fact that we support the consultations and consensus-based decision-making that respect

the independence of the governments of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. Having said that, we think more consultations on the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act should have been held in the context of this bill.

● (1535)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on her excellent speech.

I would like to ask her why, yet again, the 50 amendment put forward in committee were rejected and sometimes even declared inadmissible. Those amendments were based on excellent testimony from people concerned about the two bills that were merged into one.

Why is the government still rejecting reasoned amendments that are supported by witnesses who are actually living this reality?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, I would simply say that the bill is more than 150 pages long.

How is it possible that not a single one of the 50 amendments we proposed could improve the bill? They should have at least been studied further.

Naturally, the Conservatives decided to do as they saw fit and did not accept any of the amendments. That is really too bad because the amendments were based on testimony and were meant to help northerners.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Compton—Stanstead just spoke about the rejected amendments.

People asked for more time so that they could make certain amendments in order to improve the bill. That is a good thing.

I would like my colleague to tell us what she thinks about the idea of giving certain groups more time so that they can study the bill some more and have some input on the amendments.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

I have here Paul Quassa's testimony before the committee. He is chair of the Nunavut Planning Commission and he said:

This organization has been critically underfunded for nearly a decade. Industry and Inuit have told us that the land use planning process takes too long, and we agree. However, without additional resources, [they are] helpless to respond.

A bit later, he said:

...without appropriate financial and human resources and the expansion of the commission's jurisdiction to include all land, water, and marine areas...the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act...will miss the mark.

They will not be able to achieve their goal.

Government Orders

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, these are not new issues. Something could have been done as early as 1990, but we have seen nothing until now. Only the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives have been in government since 1990. Now the Conservatives are in power, and nothing was done until today.

I think this comes a little late. This needs to be done, and it needs to be done fast.

What does my colleague think of the fact that this issue has been dragging on for so long and no one has done anything until now?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his second question.

Since 1993, funding for the commission has been adjusted based on domestic demand implicit price indexes. Taking current funding levels into account, the commission is having a hard time fulfilling its obligations.

Legislative measures will add obligations beyond those imposed by the agreement.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you have heard several times in the House today, the New Democratic Party is in support of this legislation. However, we think it is important to bring to the House the concerns raised by the many witnesses who came from Nunavut and the Northwest Territories to express some concerns about the legislation. They took the time to make sound, genuine recommendations for improving the bill. Some of the issues were not resolved in the time for consultation. I would like to share some of those, as have some of my colleagues.

I will be sharing my time today with my colleague, the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

The bill is a very important one. It is very important that all jurisdictions in Canada have a sound system for reviewing projects, for planning developments in their communities and for environmental impact assessments. This particular legislation has been long in coming, as my colleagues have pointed out. The agreement between the Crown and the people of Nunavut was signed in 1993. Yet here we are, two decades later, and this legislation is only now being brought forward. There have been successive governments in power that have dropped the ball. To the credit of the government, it has moved forward with the legislation. There has been a greater attempt at consultation, but clearly not enough.

Interestingly, in the bill there is reference to the duty to consult. I am not sure that some of my colleagues have raised this issue. In the bill, under part 1, which deals with the Nunavut planning and project assessment act, the minister is obligated to consult closely with the territorial minister, the designated Inuit organization, the commission and the board created under the bill on any amendments to the bill in the future. What is not made clear is whether the minister is obligated to do that consultation in advance of tabling the bill. There are a number of matters that merit improvement. Perhaps the government will listen to my hon. colleagues, who have suggested

that it would be wise to have a review of this legislation sooner than 10 years from now so that we might address some of the factors that are missing, particularly in the second part of the bill dealing with surface rights in the Northwest Territories.

Part 1 of the bill deals with Nunavut planning and project assessment. Many of the mechanisms created in this legislation are already set out in the land claims agreement. That is the normal course of what has happened in the modern treaties. The step that was missing was that we needed the federal legislation to actually implement the intricacies of the systems for planning and assessment. To their credit, the people of Nunavut have been proceeding for 20 years to try to deal with these complicated matters without the legislative framework. Now we have a legislative framework.

As I mentioned, I had the privilege of sitting in on the committee for one day to replace one of my colleagues. I had an opportunity to talk with a number of the representatives from Nunavut and with other witnesses who have raised a number of concerns about the bill. They had a number of pragmatic, practical recommendations to improve the bill. Sad to say, none of the recommendations made to the committee, which we brought forward as proposed amendments, were accepted. I think that is most regrettable. It raises questions about how sincere was the consultation on the bill.

One thing I would like to bring attention to, which I am not sure anyone else has mentioned, is relevant to the issues that have arisen with the bill. There has been some suggestion, particularly by the member for Western Arctic, that concerns have been raised by the first nation peoples in the Northwest Territories that the part of the bill to do with the surface rights board is perhaps being rushed through too quickly, for a number of reasons.

• (1545)

Not all of the first nation final agreements include a surface rights board. In some cases they are saying they do not have any issues under the surface rights system, and they are asking, what is the rush? In other cases, some first nations have said that since they have not settled their land claims yet, they will likely litigate.

Therefore, there are a lot of questions about the rushing through and, again, the omnibus nature of it. The personality of the government when it has dragged its heels seems to be to wrap it all up tight with a ribbon and table it in the House. In this case, these are two very distinct pieces of legislation that cover two distinct territories of our country. It is rather puzzling that it has forced these together.

The matter I want to raise is the series of legal actions, first filed by the Inuit of Nunavut, represented by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, against the Crown, in 2006. They filed that action, very regrettably, because negotiations had broken down on the duty of the federal Crown to actually deliver its side of that modern treaty. A big part of that was passing over the necessary finances for Nunavut to begin acting as a modern government. The action dealt with breaches of the agreement relating to core funding to establish systems of governance; failure of the Crown to act in a manner consistent with the honour of the Crown; and, contrary to the terms of the Nunavut final agreement, failure of the federal Crown to deliver its responsibilities.

Government Orders

Since 2003, proper and adequate funding has not been provided. It is interesting to hear the list of entities within the Nunavut government that the federal government was not supporting, which goes to the very matters under this legislation. It was failing to adequately fund the Nunavut Planning Commission, the Nunavut Impact Review Board, the Nunavut Water Board, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, the Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal, and the hunters and trappers organizations.

In addition, the action alleged that the federal government was failing to deliver a general monitoring plan, which is required under the agreement. Last year, in June, the court held that in fact the government had erred in law and was required to provide that funding. Guess what happened? The government has appealed that matter. Therefore, instead of simply transferring over the dollars that it signed on to and is constitutionally obligated to transfer, it has simply taken Nunavut to court, again.

They have also alleged no co-operation in the development and implementation of adequate employment and training, which was obviously necessary in order to deliver the functions of all of these boards for planning and assessment. They also advised that there was no Inuit impact and benefit agreement entered into.

There has since been a land claims coalition created, which includes the various Nunavut entities and other governments that have been created under modern treaties. In fact, that coalition of people under modern treaties met in this area just last week and had discussions about the frustrations they are still facing, some progress they are making, and the successes and attributes of working together.

Therefore, the legal actions proceed. Most of their claims have yet to be resolved so they have to continue in the courts, at the same time that they were sitting down and trying to negotiate in good faith. To the credit of the people of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, they did sit down and try to find time, regardless of the lack of appropriate resources and expertise to help them in those negotiations.

It is my understanding that many of these same concerns have been raised regarding the content of Bill C-47. The bill contains no duty or commitment to contribute the resources necessary to implement these selfsame commissions, boards and tribunals established under the first nation final agreements and self-government agreements.

As has been stated by my colleagues, many of the witnesses who came forward said they were delighted that this legislation is finally coming forward after 20 years but they had additional measures they need to make sure it will work properly. Those witnesses are the people who chair and participate on the boards, tribunals and commissions. Among the recommendations that they made are the very ones we brought to the attention of the House. They include the fact that legislation should include a requirement by the government to adequately finance these boards, commissions and tribunals.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague who, as all the members on

this side of the House know, does a lot of work with first nations and northern communities. She is doing an amazing job on a file that she knows very well.

As I said in the House earlier today, I am learning more and more about this bill, about how it will work and how it came to be. I was quite disappointed that the 50 or so amendments proposed by the official opposition were all rejected. And yet those amendments were based on important testimony from people who appeared in committee and who had something important to say about this.

I would like to share a thought with my colleague in that regard. Would she not agree that the government showed a lack of respect for northern communities and first nations populations when it refused to listen to them and rejected those amendments? What does my colleague think?

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would not like to attribute a particular view such as that to any party in this House. However, I could answer the reverse question. I would have thought that the most respectful thing to do would have been to seriously consider the additional amendments that the representatives of the northern governments on behalf of their northern people came forward to the parliamentary committee to present.

Given the fact that the Conservatives gave short shrift to the amendments and did not consider or implement them, why is that important? Two of the most important measures that my colleagues tabled were that the legislation should include specific provisions to provide for participant funding. When I was in committee that day, it was very clear to me that the witnesses from Nunavut were very supportive of that and very concerned that it would not be included. The other very clear recommendation that came from the witnesses, including Paul Quassa, chair of the Nunavut Planning Commission, was the very serious concern that they are already overwhelmed in trying to deliver the responsibilities under the planning commission, and that with increasing responsibilities coming to them, if they are not given additional resources and expertise, they could not possibly deliver their functions in the manner that is necessary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the land claim agreements were reached in the early 1990s.

Can my colleague enlighten me? Why was this not done immediately after those agreements? Why did we have to wait over 20 years for the government to address this?

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I think that question would be better directed to the government.

Government Orders

I cannot possibly think of any reasonable reason for a 20-year delay on living up to commitments under a treaty. The current National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations has said very clearly, as have other first nation leaders of late, particularly through the Idle No More movement, that “we are all treaty people”.

It is not just the first nation peoples, but the Inuit and potentially the Métis, who might sign these treaties or first nation final agreements. We, the people of Canada, under the guise of the federal Crown, also sign on to these agreements. We all have a responsibility to hold our government responsible to live up to what it signs on to in those agreements. We have a responsibility going forward that the government lives up to the terms of this legislation and provides the adequate resources and expertise, so that the peoples of the north can move forward and in fact benefit from the economic development that the Conservative government is chomping at the bit to make happen in the north.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-47.

I took the time to listen to my colleagues' speeches today and to learn more about the details of this bill because I am not a member of the committee that studied it. I was really interested in the arguments made and the process followed by the committee following the appearance of witnesses and experts who came to comment on the bill.

Before I go into the details, I would like to mention that one of my colleagues caught my attention when they said that we must not forget that the realities in the north or in the regions are often very different than those in the south or in major centres. We often forget that. I represent a riding on Laval Island, the riding of Alfred-Pellan, which is often considered as a rather urban area because it is located in a major metropolitan area. Even though 90% of the riding is agricultural and very rural, we are part of the major metropolitan area.

We often forget that the reality in one part of the country is extremely different from that in another. Today, it is important to point that out and not to forget it. I have family in Canada's far north and in Hudson's Bay. Furthermore, one of my very closest collaborators, who I adore, will be moving to the Yukon in the next few weeks. I will be losing her, unfortunately, but I am very proud of her. She loves the Yukon, and I am happy for her and will take the opportunity to go visit her.

Before becoming an MP, I worked for Quebec's ministry of natural resources and wildlife in northern communities. I mainly worked with them on issues related to outfitters, forestry and anything related to the importance of adding value to and preserving these resources, which was extremely important to these communities. We have to make this the focal point of the bill.

We cannot forget that economic development and jobs in northern regions, in the territories—the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, for example—depend on natural resources. Natural resources are often the main economic driver in these communities. We need to take the time to sit down and underscore that. We also need to take the time to put good legislation into place to support northern development. We need to do a good job with our territorial

legislation so that we can properly support these people and so that economic development does not happen at the expense of the environment or northern communities. It needs to happen in a way that is respectful of the people who live there.

We need to put the emphasis on respecting the people who live there. When this bill was studied in committee, the members of the official opposition took the time to listen to witnesses and experts who are directly affected by or who know the subject matter of Bill C-47. We based our 50 amendments on their testimony because it is critical that we listen to those people. What is disappointing is that none of the opposition amendments were accepted.

In hindsight, I am not really surprised. Members of the opposition parties, and even the parties that are not recognized in the House, often talk about what happens and how we can react to the government's arrogance in response to opposition amendments or proposals. We are not surprised that these amendments were refused, but I am a bit surprised that the government does not take the time to listen to the witnesses and experts in committee. They are there in good faith, to share their concerns and to talk about how they view the situation because it affects them directly.

• (1555)

Witnesses and committees are there for a reason. Committees are there to hear from people and to make the best laws possible. That is an important point when it comes to Bill C-47: have we come up with the best law possible?

For example, the hon. member for Western Arctic spoke a lot this morning about the amendments that were proposed. He wondered whether people were satisfied with the current version of Bill C-47. No one seems very happy with the current version of the bill being presented at third reading. That is really sad because, by listening to what witnesses had to say in committee, we could have fine-tuned and improved this bill. As parliamentarians, it is our responsibility to produce the best bills possible, and this bill is, once again, a bit off the mark. We could have produced something better. It is really sad.

Another one of my colleagues raised the fact that most of the first nations who were consulted said that they were not ready and that they needed more time to think about this bill and to see what types of amendments could be proposed. Unfortunately, this point of view was not taken into consideration either. That is also extremely sad. Not enough attention was paid to the witnesses and the first nations needed more time to examine Bill C-47 in order to ensure that the legislation was good for everyone.

Government Orders

Since I am talking about first nations, I cannot help but think of some of the other issues that we have dealt with recently that affect them. I am thinking, for example, of the Idle No More movement, which showed just how important it is to listen to all Canadians. It seems that, at times, the Conservatives are not doing that. We have said it before and we are saying it again, loud and clear. This movement is proof that the government is not listening to the problems of first nations. Bill C-47 could have been a good example of openness, transparency and co-operation with the first nations to help them understand that we are working with them.

When I think about first nations, I am thinking about the Shannen's Dream motion that we unanimously passed several months ago. It had to do with education for all first nations peoples. We all built that together, and we all agreed on it. We also could have used that kind of unity from all parties in the House for Bill C-47, in order to work together here.

These little things make me hesitate a bit. I am a little sad to see that all these amendments were, unfortunately, rejected, but the NDP supports consultations and consensus-based decision-making that respect the independence of the governments of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

We in the official opposition are fans of consultation. I like it a lot, as several of my colleagues probably do, as well. I use that approach a lot in my riding. I use it on budgets, on various bills and on all issues affecting the Alfred-Pellan community. Listening to the public and consulting them as often as possible is an extremely important part of democracy.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the NDP will keep defending the rights and interests of northerners and promote the long-term prosperity of Canada's northern communities, from coast to coast.

• (1600)

The communities are all different. I think we need to accept the differences of each and every one.

• (1605)

[*English*]

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members of the opposition have made a point today of mentioning the government's reluctance to consider amendments to Bill C-47 that had, in most cases, been recommended by witnesses in the committee. For the record, I would like to address those comments from a different perspective.

Generally speaking, most of the recommended changes have been brought forward in our consultation efforts for both parts of the bill, and we have heard them before. Where accommodations could be made, they were, and there were hundreds of them. In other cases, accommodations were not made, for a variety of very good reasons. As an example, it has been suggested that the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board should have the authority to deny access under certain circumstances. The land claim agreements do not provide the authority for the board to deny access. When a mineral right is issued under an act of Parliament, the holder of the right is inherently entitled to exercise that right and cannot be denied access.

The bill would not change the rights of access or mineral 10-year regime that currently exists in the NWT, nor should it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary for her comments.

If she had listened to my speech, she would have understood the importance of some of the proposed amendments. Among other things, the first nations had asked for more time to review the bill properly. In addition, another good amendment relating to the request for increased transparency for the commissioner could have been studied. It was rejected. I do not understand why the government opposite is rejecting a request for more transparency. I found that strange.

On our side, we like Canadians to be consulted. We most certainly could have taken more time to do that and to do a better job of it.

As my colleague from Western Arctic said, no one is really happy with this bill. No one is jumping for joy at the thought of adopting Bill C-47. We could have fleshed it out more, but the consultations are still a step forward.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Alfred-Pellan for her speech and for clarifying several points.

We know that the north is gaining importance, particularly in terms of the geopolitical perspective of that part of our country. That is why I feel it is important to consider the rights and interests of the first inhabitants of the region seriously.

I know that my colleague has already commented on this, but I would like her to expand on the NDP's perspective on the rights and interests of first peoples, which are critical to this debate.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, our deputy critic for intergovernmental aboriginal affairs.

I would like to point out what a phenomenal job he is doing with first nations. I appreciate his work because it helps and enlightens us tremendously.

He touched on an extremely important point: respect for people in northern communities and first nations. These are the first people to feel the effects of choices made in Ottawa, in southern Canada.

Our choices will affect communities that are now coping with harsh changes with respect to natural resources, land development, jobs, the environment and climate change. This is extremely important.

Government Orders

My colleague raised a very good point. We have some serious work to do in the House together with first nations. They must be included in the process. Consultations must make sense. We have to base our legislation on testimony from experts and the people who will be affected by the legislation.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today to address what I believe is in fact a very important bill, Bill C-47, and the impact it is going to have, which I believe is quite significant.

Even though it has been made very clear this afternoon and this morning that the government should have been, and could have been, a lot more open-minded in listening to the amendments that were being proposed and in accepting amendments, I must say I did find it somewhat interesting. We have had a number of speakers address the issue. In the last series of questions, a Conservative member stood in her place and virtually read a statement. That statement was in defence of the government. No doubt she was doing a little bit of cherry-picking as she tried to explain why it is that a particular amendment did not meet the government's satisfaction and therefore the government did not accept it.

The point is that at the end of the day there was a significant number of amendments, more than 50 in total, that did not originate with the government. For whatever reasons, the government made the decision not to accept them.

Portions of the bill regarding Nunavut do not mirror the language in the land claim agreement. The Conservative government rejected any amendments put forward to rectify that particular issue. I think we could go on and on in regard to the number of amendments and to what degree the government was sympathetic to listening to what was being said in justification to those amendments.

The leader of the Green Party posed a question. It did not necessarily have to do with just Bill C-47 but with government legislation in general. What we see is that when a bill goes to committee, the government has virtually zero tolerance in terms of opposition amendments. It is almost as if the Conservatives perceive an amendment coming from the opposition as being something that is bad, and whether it makes sense or not, whether it makes the legislation better or not, they are obligated to vote against it.

It is interesting. I have had the opportunity to chat with some of my colleagues who have been around a bit longer than I have in the House, who were around when there was a Liberal government. We found that there were many opposition amendments, a significant percentage of them, that were not only accepted but were appreciated, because at the end of the day what we wanted to be able to achieve in government was healthier and stronger legislation. The then-government was more open to the type of amendments opposition members were making. That even includes amendments from the Reform Party, New Democrats and others.

That is an important point. Hopefully the government—not only in dealing with Bill C-47, because it has already gone through that particular process—will listen to what is being said, not only by itself but also by members in opposition, and that it will be a little more sensitive to improving legislation by allowing even opposition amendments to pass through the system.

I wanted to be able to comment on Bill C-47 because I believe there are a lot of similarities to what has happened in the province of Manitoba, with what is happening in Bill C-47 and some of the issues related to natural resources and compensation, planning, our environment and so forth.

The province of Manitoba, like many other regions of our country, has vast spreads of land. We have first nations and others who have been there for a good number of years. Through that settlement, we can see that there has been some significant development. In Manitoba, for example, we had the northern flood agreement.

● (1610)

We talk about planning. Little planning was done back in the late sixties and early seventies and as a result some decisions were made too quickly and there were a number of consequences. Reserves, whether it was Split Lake, Nelson House or Norway House, were having issues in terms of compensation, relocation, things of that nature.

By not having agreements or legislation in place to protect some of those interests to ensure that more planning is done before some of this construction takes place results in paying more or relocating more. It demonstrates a lack of respect for those individuals both socially and economically.

That is why there is a great deal of sympathy. We should not take this for granted. First nations are suing the government because they feel the government did not necessarily compensate them, but too much water was diverted in terms of flooding in the city of Winnipeg and that water ultimately ended up in Lake Manitoba. This had a significant impact on reserves with respect to displacements and so forth. Now they are having to go to court.

It is critically important that we recognize the need to plan well in advance. Some settlements have been around for hundreds of years. With respect to natural resources, we owe it to those settlements and to our environment to go out of our way to protect where we can and try to marginalize the negative impacts.

A good example of that is in remote areas. Quite often there are no roads leading out of them so people have to fly out. These remote areas are quite pristine and beautiful to look at. They are quite impressive. We want to do what we can to preserve them, while looking at our natural resources. It is easy to understand why there is such a huge demand for economic development. There are phenomenal natural resources in those vast acres of land that generate wealth for individuals far beyond those who happen to live in the community.

Nunavut has a population of around 45,000 people. A significant amount of resources are developed in that territory. As a result, we need proper legislation in place that would protect those interests. All Canadians benefit immensely from the type of development that takes place in these communities, whether it is mining or other resources. The sky is the limit. If we do not do our due diligence and have the necessary infrastructure, and I am referring to environmental laws and strong regulations, then many mistakes will be made and some of those mistakes could be costly.

Government Orders

•(1615)

It does not take much to damage the environment and it could cost tens of millions of dollars because of one relatively small mistake. I listened to some of the discussions today at third reading and I am sensitive to the fact that maybe the committee should have done a little more. When I say “maybe”, I say that tongue in cheek. It should have done more.

The Liberal Party is going to be voting in favour of the legislation. That does not mean we believe the government has done a good job in getting the bill to this stage. It has come a long way in terms of process.

I have heard the New Democrats talking about the process, even periodically taking some shots at the former government. I tend to want to defend the former government. Whether it was Paul Martin, Jean Chrétien or Pierre Trudeau, they did a wonderful job in terms of the development in northern areas. In fact, it goes all the way back to Pierre Trudeau, who started the negotiations on the division of the Northwest Territories. The note that was provided to me said that it was in 1999 when Jean Chrétien did the final declaration, if I can put it that way, in Nunavut becoming a province. I recognize a lot of work and negotiations had to take place. Plebiscites were required. That is something we believe is absolutely essential in going forward. We need to work with the people who live in and call the north their home.

I reflect on individuals who I have met over the years. One of the most prominent individuals is a former speaker of the Manitoba legislature, George Hickes, a fabulous speaker. He was Manitoba's first elected speaker in the chamber. I had the opportunity as house leader to have many discussions with George, everything from his ability to jump out of boats and catch beluga whales to how important Nunavut was in terms of economic development, the opportunities that existed and the sense of pride he had in that territory. It made him feel good because many of his family and friends originated from that area. Nunavut is on the northern Manitoba border and Manitobans like to think there is, indeed, a special relationship between the territory and their province.

When we look at the territory, much like we think of northern Manitoba, the extraction of natural resources is a wonderful thing. It adds so much to the development of our great nation. What is also important for many of the people who call these communities home, which are scattered throughout Nunavut or the northern regions of the province, is not just natural resources being tapped into and taken south or circulated throughout the world, they want more in the development of their economy.

There are certain industries there that need to be encouraged and fostered. This is something the Liberal Party has talked about and wants to move forward. I could go back to my example of former speaker George Hickes of the Manitoba legislature and the beluga whales and the attraction that could potentially bring for tourism. There are polar bears and all sorts of wildlife that exist to potentially develop tourism.

•(1620)

It is interesting, on Baffin Island there were archeological digs. It was discovered that there had been individuals from Europe, landing

and trading for centuries with the indigenous people in that area. One of those digs showed very clearly that it was well before the year 1400. These are the types of things that would attract tourists. The development of its infrastructure, housing and other types of commercial developments are really important.

When we talk to the local people who call these communities their home and who live up north, they want to see more development of their ports. By providing the development of ports, we would be providing more opportunities for economic activity. Not necessary just the type of activity I have referred to, but also natural resources. The potential for research and development is phenomenal up north.

Looking at what else we can do to further develop and encourage economic activity, most people might be surprised with some of the long-term population projections. We are not going into the hundreds of thousands. We are still talking about a relatively small, but wonderful population, which will likely grow 5,000, 10,000, 15,000 over the next number of years. A lot this will be determined by the economic development that takes place. Quite often, through economic development, more people are attracted to the area or more people are born in the area and want to stay there.

It is always encouraging when individuals make the commitment to go north, whether it is Yukon, the Northwest Territories or maybe other communities outside of Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, all of which are wonderful destinations, but these are big population bases.

It is critically important that we support this legislation going forward. We would be surprised at the number of Canadians who are familiar with the type of development taking place up north. We can rest assured they are concerned about that development and the impact it will have on the broader community.

I visit high schools, whether it is Maples Collegiate or Sisler High, and I have had the opportunity to talk to high school students over the years, as I am sure all of us have. I do not mean just those two schools. I could also include St. Johns and R.B. Russell. The point is, I have had the opportunity to talk to many young people who live in Winnipeg North and these individuals care passionately about our environment.

•(1625)

When I was in high school, the environment was not really a hot topic of discussion. Today in our high schools throughout our country the environment is a hot topic.

When we want to deal with the issue of the environment, preserve and protect our environment up north, we look at the current infrastructure and the bureaucracy of the government. We need to recognize that we need to have a strong national role to protect and support our environment up north.

Our high school students and others, but I focus on the high schools students because of changing attitudes, recognize how important it is to improve legislation and our regulations so industry can be developed and natural resources can be tapped into in an appropriate fashion, which adds value to the communities there, first and foremost. It brings value to all Canadians in a very real, tangible way. These regulations and laws will protect and ensure there is an orderly flow of planning and our environment is being protected at the very least.

Government Orders

•(1630)

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his opening remarks, the member for Winnipeg North mentioned Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and mentioned that we were not open-minded to some of those recommendations it brought forward. I noticed in the speeches earlier by the official opposition, the NDP members, that they mentioned we were not doing enough in the consultation process.

I would like at this point to remind all members of the House that NTI was involved in the initial stages of drafting this legislation, and many of the issues members are bringing forward to the House today were actually discussed and debated at length during the working level of the bill.

Again, some of the changes that were brought forward and discussed at the working level were actually incorporated into the bill, and that is what they are seeing at the committee stage, so some of the comments members are making today are really unfounded.

In some instances, some of those recommendations that may have been discussed were not necessarily accepted, but it was not regarding the different interpretations about which the member has just spoken. It was in most cases on how the legislation was to be put together.

I think our government has been pretty clear on the bill. We believe it is clear and concise, and I wish the opposition parties would stop putting through comments that are not really justified.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member who stood previously and posed the question about amendments actually made a statement saying how the government is responding positively toward amendments.

We have found that is not necessarily all that accurate. If I could ask the member a question it would be: Could she tell us one opposition amendment that was accepted and voted on and supported by the Conservatives—

Mr. John Rafferty: In any committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: One of my colleagues suggested that this is in any committee.

Dealing strictly with this bill, I do not believe that every one of the amendments that were being provided by the opposition were fundamentally flawed to the degree in which the government had to vote against them. However, there seems to be a mentality that it is not good if Conservatives allow for an opposition amendment to pass, so it does not really matter; they are not going to pass it.

Maybe that is one of the differences between the Liberal government and the Conservative government, which were both majority governments. We find that the Liberal majority government often accepted amendments from the opposition. When I say often, I am talking about 20% to 30% of the time.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North spoke about planning and development in the territory, and I know economic development and development of resources are certainly important, but there is also the environment and social aspects of this development that need to be taken into consideration. We know this

proposed legislation is being supported by the mining industry, among others.

Could the member tell us if he thinks this proposed legislation meets today's standards in terms of development, taking into consideration that the developments benefit the people who live in the north?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member asked a great question. At the end of the day, I think we do need to recognize that, overall, Bill C-47 is worthy of all of our votes. I trust that it will likely pass unanimously from the House.

We will also find a significant percentage of MPs who would ultimately argue that the bill does not go far enough. There are many different things we could have done to improve upon the legislation, which would have made it that much more acceptable in our communities, in particular those communities this bill is meant to serve directly.

Indirectly, all Canadians have a stake in what is taking place. I believe a vast majority of Canadians have very caring hearts and attitudes toward what happens in northern Canada. Whether it is through documentaries or individual contacts, we build relationships and there is an appreciation for what is happening up north.

At the end of the day, is this legislation good enough? Well, it is a step forward. The government did lose an opportunity by not accepting or being more open-minded in regard to amendments, which would have probably addressed a lot of the concerns that member might have had.

•(1635)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask just a quick question because I know this is the third question and we probably do not have much time.

The Dehcho and Akaitcho peoples in the Northwest Territories have not completed their land negotiations with the Northwest Territories at this time. This legislation imposes a surface rights regime on them. Is the member concerned that this could affect the pace of land claims negotiations in the Northwest Territories?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect it will. At the end of the day, we need to take into consideration land surface claims and land claims in general. I always feel a little frustrated because I think some of the greatest beneficiaries of these claims are in fact lawyers. I have nothing against lawyers; they deserve what they get.

Having said that, I suspect there will be some additional pressure as to speeding up the process of land claims. Hopefully, it will be done in a fair fashion.

I am somewhat disappointed that resolving land claims seems to take a lot longer than most people think it would. The types of issues that are there are fairly wide in scope. It does not just exist within the Northwest Territories or our territories in general, even though we are talking about significant pieces of property and surface lands, but it exists in many different regions of our country.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Etobicoke North, Public Safety; and the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Veterans Affairs.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak to this important issue as represented by Bill C-47.

Bill C-47 is not a small piece of legislation by any stretch of the imagination. I think there are upward of 170 pages. It deals with two very distinct matters, one involving Nunavut and the other involving the Northwest Territories.

There has been some concern raised, and frankly I think it well placed, that these two issues should be dealt with separately. They have sufficient magnitude in and of themselves and deal with similar yet very different issues and contexts. Therefore, the people of those regions, the people of Canada and the members of this House would have been better served had we had the opportunity to deal with these matters separately.

Having said that, I will begin by addressing each matter.

It has been said by many members of this caucus and other members of this House that matters of development in the north are very significant. The climate is changing, which is having an impact on the territories, on ice cover, on the seasonality of hunting and transportation and on the culture of many communities throughout this region. There is a great deal of work being done, but some would suggest that there is not enough work being done at this stage. However, we continue to push for the science to properly understand the environmental changes that are happening in the north as a result of climate change.

I was talking with a couple of scientists the other day who are studying fisheries under the ice to try to determine a baseline for existing species of sea life in order to discern the results of climate change, when the ice melts and there is increased marine traffic, which is happening, to hopefully know how to properly respond. There is also some research being done in Cambridge Bay where electronic monitoring devices have been placed under the water to better understand exactly what is happening as the environment continues to change.

The changing environment has a huge impact on the people who live in our north. It is creating great pressures not only in terms of the environment and the culture of the people but in terms of others wanting to exploit both the resources and possible transportation routes through the north. All of those pressures will create additional problems for that area, environmentally, culturally and otherwise.

• (1640)

Part 1 of the bill is the Nunavut planning and project assessment act. It is a piece of legislation that would give some structure, some framing, to development issues and how they would carry forward when there are disputes and how they would be resolved. It has a lot to do with the whole science of land use planning. It is a matter that

has been under some considerable discussion with the Government of Nunavut. They recognize that this is an important piece of legislation as they transition to their own independent government as a province. That work, that devolution, is still in the works. The land claim agreement was initially signed in 1993 and ratified in 1999, I believe. The next step is to negotiate those governance questions in terms of devolution of authority from the Crown. That is expected to take a number of years yet.

In the interim, I think it is fair to say that the Government of Nunavut has been very active in trying to get this type of legislation in place to set particular standards and a particular regime for land use planning and project assessment for now and in the future, until it turns over strictly to their authority.

The Nunavut planning and project assessment act would require that the Inuit and the Government of Canada establish a joint system to oversee the way resources are managed in that territory. This agreement would represent the last outstanding legislative obligation of the federal government related to the Nunavut land claims agreement established, as I indicated earlier, in 1993. It would also fulfill the first deliverable of the recently introduced action plan to improve the regulatory regimes of the north.

This provision of Bill C-47, as it relates to the Nunavut planning and project assessment act, would also clearly spell out the roles, powers, functions and authorities of all parties, including how their members would be appointed. The parties include the Nunavut Planning Commission, or NCP; the Nunavut Impact Review Board, or NIRB; Inuit groups; and governments.

The proposed process for impact assessments would be streamlined and made more efficient, especially for smaller projects, which, it is hoped, would make investments in Nunavut more attractive and profitable, not only for come-from-away companies but for locally based operations. It would establish timelines for various decision-making points in the land use planning and environmental assessment processes to create a more efficient and predictable regulatory regime. trans-boundary and trans-regional projects would now be reviewed by joint panels. Environmental assessment requirements would also be harmonized. As necessary, enforcement provisions would establish new and more effective tools for ensuring that developers follow the terms and conditions set by the NIRB. It would also provide for the development of general and specific monitoring plans that would enable both governments to track the environmental, social and economic impacts of projects.

The bill would go further. It would define how and by whom land use plans would be prepared, amended, reviewed and implemented in Nunavut. It would define what kind and scope of activity would constitute the project. It is fair to say that these regulatory improvements are important steps toward providing Nunavut with decision-making power over the pace and magnitude of resource and land development in Nunavut.

Government Orders

•(1645)

What has already been said here today in debate is that we see this section of the bill as being something that has been sought after by the Government of Nunavut. We have certainly heard some concerns that some tweaking needs to be done. We hope that while the government was resistant to any amendments brought forward at committee, it will recognize that the bill is not perfect, by any stretch of the imagination. It does set out some direction to achieve the outcome as required, so we will certainly be supporting this part of the bill.

I want to make it very clear that the NDP supports consultation and consensus-based decision-making that respects the autonomy of the governments of both Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. We suggest that there should have been more consultation in play as it related to the Northwest Territories surface rights board act, which is part 2 of Bill C-47.

Finally, I would underline that the NDP will continue to fight for the rights of northerners and for the long-term prosperity of northern communities.

Let me move now to part 2 of Bill C-47. Part 2 is the Northwest Territories surface rights board act. The bill proclaims to apply to all of the territory of the Northwest Territories, and the land claims there too. The problem is that not all of that territory is covered by land claims. Not all of the groups have, in fact, reached agreement with the Crown on land claims.

Section 26 of the bill implements section 26 of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Final Agreement. It implements section 27 of the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement and section 6.6 of the Akaitcho land claims and self-government agreement. The preamble of the bill, interestingly enough, also says that the Inuvialuit final agreement provide for such a board. However, it is not clear where the legal provision is found for that agreement. Additionally, there is no provision for a surface rights board in the Salt River First Nations treaty agreement, further complicating the issue of the unsettled land claims for the Dehcho and Akaitcho first nations.

These are very sensitive issues. They do not appear to be issues that have been adequately recognized by the government. We are talking about great areas of land. The territories of the north are one-third the area of Canada. We are talking about huge expanses in the Northwest Territories, with a population of, I believe, 40,000 people. It is over a million square kilometres of area. It is a big territory. The ability to properly consult and engage with the population is significant.

•(1650)

Some witnesses suggested that there was no need for the establishment of this board at this particular time, that the matters that have been in dispute have been minimal and that the problems created by trying to impose a process on a territory where there are no land claims agreements is fraught with difficulty. We have heard government members stand up and say that we have to set out a process and try to avoid the possibility of disputes going into the courts. However, that is where they are headed if they continue to not recognize the rights of the first nations people who are in these

territories, the Inuit. They have traditional rights and are demanding that those rights be recognized.

The Idle No More movement has raised the heads of people who have said to the Conservatives that they have a duty to consult with them as Canadians. They have a constitutional duty to consult with them as first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. If they continue to ignore the fact that they have those responsibilities, they will be moving forward in a manner that is not going to be conducive to the proper development of governance and the proper development of ownership and resource development. Certainly, I would suggest, that is in no one's interest.

We were disappointed. Fifty amendments were introduced by the opposition at committee, 47 by the official opposition and three by the Liberals. Those were amendments asked for by witnesses. The Conservatives talk about how they have engaged in fulsome consultation with the groups that would be affected. Yet while these groups recognized that this legislation, in its intent, was solid, there were changes necessary. As I have said in this House on many occasions, it is our responsibility to ensure that the legislation that leaves here is the best it can possibly be. It is one thing to get legislation through, but to get it changed is a whole different kettle of fish. It is extraordinarily difficult.

We have the situation, with respect to the Northwest Territories, that it is much further along in that whole devolution of governance process. It may not be that many more years before it will be able to correct the problems that have already been raised and the authority, as provided under this legislation, will pass to them in a few short years, perhaps, and then it will be able to correct those problems. That is not the case as it relates to the agreement for Nunavut. That is why the member for Western Arctic asked that one of the amendments be for a five-year review. It would be put in this legislation that in five years there would be a proper review to ensure that it was working.

I indicate again our respect for the governments of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut for making sure that development occurs in a manner they approve of and have control of. I urge all members, especially the Conservatives, to recognize our responsibility to recognize the rights of those governments.

•(1655)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, non-designated areas, unsettled areas, are crown lands, and inherently the Crown consents to surface access when issuing subsurface rights under the act of Parliament.

Where there is an owner-occupant on those lands that are not part of the land claims agreement, a dispute could be heard before the board. The act would not impact land claims negotiation, as it would not be within the board's jurisdiction on unsettled land claims unless there is an owner or occupant on those lands.

Those who are negotiating claims have been consulted throughout the development of this bill. I would like to get the member's comments on that.

Government Orders

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, it is not unlike the way the government responded when we said, under Bill C-38 and Bill C-45, that it was not consulting where it was required to, and it said that it had consulted just fine and that everything was good to go. Subsequently we have seen the Idle No More movement. We have seen first nations groups from one end of the country to the other file suit in the Supreme Court of Canada to challenge the government on that very question of consultation and rights.

That is the point the government continues to miss. Even though there is not an agreement, it fails to recognize the inherent right of the first nations people, the Inuit and the Métis to these lands.

• (1700)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member is in regard to development of the Northwest Territories, or any territory in the north. There is always a great concern about economic development. I share in many of those concerns, especially those related to the environment, along with the impact it is going to have on those who call these communities their home.

Does the member feel there is enough environment protection today to meet the potential demands from the different interests or stakeholders who are not necessarily associated with the north today but who would no doubt like to get their foot in the door?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about the lack of environmental protection to deal with any development that will go forward.

As we know, under Bill C-38, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was completely repealed and rewritten. The Fisheries Act, and the ability or responsibility of the government to protect fish habitat, has been seriously constrained. The changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act have resulted in very significant changes, as have the changes to the responsibilities of Canada's offshore petroleum boards. There have been so many changes over the past year that have taken away much of the ability of the government to protect an environment as vulnerable as that in the north that it causes me, and a lot of other people, concern.

That is what exists now, let alone what is going to exist in the future. As I said, the ice melts and marine traffic increases, and the questions of oil spills, of invasive species, continue to rise. We are in no position at this point to protect the environment the way we should, with or without our partners.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot about perfect consultation. The Liberals said they might have done it in the past. I am wondering if the member could describe perfect consultation to me. This is a concept that I do not understand anymore, because obviously in committee the Conservative government has not answered any of our requests with respect to amendments.

Could the member describe perfect consultation to me?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I could talk to the member more about what is not perfect consultation, and that is the way the Conservative government has been conducting itself.

The government failed to consult with respect to Bill C-38 and Bill C-45. It failed to consult with respect to the changes to EI. It

failed to consult with provincial premiers whose provinces are going to pick up after the people who are turfed off the EI roles because of ineligibility as a result of what the government is doing with its integrity police. Employers and unions were not consulted. There has been a real lack of consultation on the part of the government. The Conservatives have taken the attitude that something is either done now or later but it has to be done. Unfortunately, we are going to be doing more of it in the courts, and that could have been prevented had the government held consultations now.

• (1705)

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear that the official opposition supports the bill.

We have done our homework, and Bill C-47 is good sound legislation that will implement land claim agreements. It is good for Nunavut, and it is good for the Northwest Territories. It will help increase predictability and efficiency so that northerners can achieve the prosperity they seek. Let us allow Bill C-47 to continue its journey through the legislative process in the Senate and help to ensure that the benefits of this legislation make their way to northern citizens.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, we will be voting in favour of this piece of legislation and it will go through. However, that does not mean that there are not some weaknesses that need to be addressed and that there were not some weaknesses in the process that the government needs to be aware of so it does not happen again. The government has stood up and faced opposition from us, and Canadians, to various pieces of legislation it has brought forward, and it has been unwilling to change.

We do not only have the duty to consult with first nations, Inuit and Métis people, but we also have the duty to accommodate and the duty to recognize inherent treaty rights and rights to land. The more the Conservatives want to put their heads in the sand and not recognize those principles, the more trouble they are going to face and the more trouble they are going to create, not only for Canadians, but also for first nations, Inuit and Métis groups in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

The short title of Bill C-47, An Act to enact the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, is the Northern Jobs and Growth Act.

Having observed the government for nearly two long years now, I am skeptical, to say the least, when I see the words “jobs” and “growth” in the same sentence. This is a far cry from what the constituents of my riding and other ridings in Canada have seen since May 2, 2011. What they are seeing is an effective opposition that is always vigilant. We do not have any choice.

Government Orders

However, let us give the government the benefit of the doubt. The bill's intentions are certainly good, since they respond to many of the expectations of the public and stakeholders affected by this legislation. It is important to point that out. We will support the bill introduced by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on November 6, 2012. The bill brings together two acts, which I named earlier. However, these two acts should have been examined separately.

Ideally, we wanted the bill to be sent to committee so that amendments could be made based on the testimony heard. To our utter amazement, our 50 amendments were all rejected or deemed inadmissible by the Conservatives in committee. It's not a perfect world. This is proof positive that the Conservatives have no idea what a fair and democratic Parliament entails. Let us not talk about fairness. They do not know what that means.

Fifty amendments were proposed. They were all based on the requests of witnesses from the Nunavut Impact Review Board, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the Northwest Territories Association of Communities, the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Nunavut Chamber of Mines, and Alternatives North. This is yet more proof that the government does not listen to the public or to the various stakeholders from the communities involved.

Subsequently, the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement provides that the Inuit and the Government of Canada establish a joint system, in partnership, to oversee how resources will be managed in the territory of Nunavut. The Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act provides a legal framework for this, as does the Yukon Surface Rights Board Act, which was created in 1994 to fulfill an obligation of the Canadian government at the time resulting from the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement.

The board is a tribunal whose primary role is to resolve access disputes between those owning or having an interest in the surface of the land and others with access rights to the land. These disputes are primarily related to accessing or using Yukon first nation settlement land and, in certain circumstances, disputes involving access to or use of non-settlement land.

As I said, we will be supporting the bill. However, we also wanted to support consultation and decision-making based on a consensus that respects the autonomy of the governments of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. This is a crucial part of any discussion about development, jobs and economic growth. We know that all the research done on minerals and the development of these areas represents the economy of the future. Since it is the economy of the future, we need to take these populations, their rights and their demands into account.

•(1710)

We based our amendments on important testimony we had heard. However, all of our amendments were rejected or deemed out of order in committee. This is unacceptable on the part of a government that claims to be democratic and that has been talking non-stop about jobs and growth since it won a majority on May 2, 2011.

Fortunately, on May 2, 2011, Canadians also elected a strong and effective opposition: the NDP. We will continue to work hard and defend the interests of all communities.

The Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act has six components.

Part 1 confirms the establishment of the Nunavut planning commission and the Nunavut impact review board.

Part 2 defines how planning will be done in the territory.

Part 3 sets out the process by which the commission will examine repercussions. It will also examine specific project proposals and determine whether they conform to the land use plan.

Part 4 provides an opportunity for the board, with the support of government, to review and assess projects outside the Nunavut settlement area that may nevertheless have an adverse impact on the Nunavut settlement area.

Part 5 contains provisions for coordinating the activities of government institutions, the use of information, monitoring, the establishment and maintenance of public registries, grandfathering, and administrative matters.

These are all administrative, technical and sometimes complex measures. The population and the governments of these regions who will be affected by the application of these bills should be consulted.

That is why we wanted those 50 amendments. Even if the Conservatives had accepted only five amendments, that would have represented 10% of the total, which would surely have been a record.

I am shocked every time I see the definitions included in this bill. Every bill provides definitions, but in this bill there is a definition for wildlife area, critical habitat, wildlife sanctuary, migratory bird sanctuary, wetland of international importance, marine protected area, Canadian heritage river and a historic place designated under the Historical Resources Act.

It makes me crazy because the government botched a bill that eliminated protection for 98% of our navigable waters.

When we talk about the environment and such things as wildlife sanctuaries, we have to wonder what the government has in mind. We wonder how the government will define and apply these laws that protect important resources for the first nations living in those areas when the time comes to enforce them.

We wanted the government to consult more and to listen, but most of all we wanted the governments of those regions to be heard.

This will always be a disappointment because we live in a democratic society where we share information and help one another. However, often there is a total lack of any such process.

•(1715)

Fortunately, the NDP is here. We will continue to protect the rights and interests of northern residents and to promote sustainable prosperity for these northern communities. I have already spoken about the reasons for this. It is because the far north holds the key to the future. Wherever there is development and growth, my colleagues and I will be present to defend the interests of the people who live there. This will have an impact on all of Canada.

Government Orders

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech. As always, he is passionate and a pleasure to listen to.

I have a question for him about the amendments to this bill proposed by the official opposition. These amendments were proposed in response to testimony from several groups, including the Nunavut Impact Review Board, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the NWT Association of Communities, the Nunavut Chamber of Mines and Alternatives North. These groups are directly affected by this bill.

The government often claims to have consulted people in the north and then washes its hands of the supposed consultation, but we know that it has a constitutional obligation to consult and to accommodate. That is an essential condition of this constitutional obligation.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about this government's obligations and about respect.

So many other majority governments before the current Conservative government have honoured signed treaties, which have always allowed for discussions with first nations members, the people who live on this land, but we are not seeing that in this case.

These consultations were properly held. All we are asking is that the government listen to these people and respect their fundamental values: respect for traditions, cultures and, especially, respect for the land, its complexity, its vastness and its immense beauty. The government says no.

We are laying the foundations that will certainly be necessary for development and growth in the area, but once again the government is showing a lack of respect for people who are asking for nothing but to be part of Canada. However, the government forgets that and we start over every time.

• (1720)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we talked about the 50 or so amendments that were systematically rejected. We talked about the fact that the agreements were reached over 20 years ago and that successive governments could have done something long before now, but they did nothing. We also talked about the companies that represent first nations and that would have liked to have more time to propose other amendments to improve this bill. This work should have been done 20 years ago. Now it is being done quickly, without listening to people.

I wonder what my colleague's thoughts are on this, but I think it is perhaps time to see a new government.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, the consequences of not consulting and not respecting these populations can include serious environmental repercussions in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. This could have an extremely harmful impact on the environment. We are already having problems with climate change, melting glaciers and declining fish stocks that can no longer meet the needs of coastal fisheries.

The most important consideration is the repercussions and consequences of this for people, for natural habitats. This government claims to listen to people from coast to coast to coast. There is enormous potential for growth on the northern coast, but we must show respect. Development will bring royalties. We want to enable these nations to evolve, but in keeping with their traditions, their culture, which is hundreds if not thousands of years old, since these populations were here long before us.

Once again, it is unacceptable for this government to completely ignore all the consultations and all the amendments that were proposed.

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are talking about Bill C-47, which has to do with a part of Canada I have not yet visited. I hope to have the chance to visit northern Canada one day.

One of the main roles of government is to represent all Canadians, to make decisions in the interest of Canadians and to work to unite all Canadians. Today, we are seeing the difference between the official opposition, which rises to speak and is interested in northern perspectives, and the government, which remains silent and rises from time to time to read out a question written by the Prime Minister's Office, without perhaps knowing what it is really about.

The first thing that I said today was that it is true that the bill as a whole is relatively good. However, it needed improvements that the government refused to make. We proposed about 55 amendments to the bill, having to do with transparency and consultations, but the government rejected them all. What reason did the government give? I really have no idea. Earlier today, a member tried to make a little public service announcement, but I do not really understand how that explained the rejection of those 55 amendments. I do not think it justified anything.

The economy in the northern regions is cyclical, which is why it often depends on mining development. We need to be aware of this reality. We also have to understand that the economic contribution of natural resources is often limited to where the mining companies are located. So the environmental issue is extremely important because people living in the north, in particular, live in much greater harmony with the environment. We have a lot to learn from how they live with the environment, from how they fish in the ocean and hunt.

The fact that the government just waived all the environmental regulations does not inspire confidence in the government's willingness to negotiate with the territories on mining or other projects. We should ask the government to respect the will of the people who live there. In fact, these territories are part of Canada, but the people who live there have to live with the consequences of pollution caused by mining projects.

For example, my colleague from Western Arctic mentioned the Giant Mine catastrophe in his speech. The government had to use taxpayers' money to deal with the environmental disaster caused by the dumping of 270,000 tonnes of arsenic into the ground. Therefore, it is important to point out that the bill could be improved in order to prevent the government from having to accept responsibility for cleaning up such environmental disasters with taxpayers' money.

Government Orders

Thus, we need serious and rigorous environmental assessments. We are saddling the next generation with a huge environmental debt. Canadians are truly ashamed of this government, which is an international embarrassment. I will come back to that later.

There is also the need for a long-term vision. When we develop natural resources, we should always take into consideration the fact that a mine will not operate forever. It is fine to pass bills that talk about development, but that is taking a short-term view. Do we really invest 100% in these communities? Will a bill that deals with negotiations for mining projects solve all the problems of the people living in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut? No.

For example, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is studying the fact that Canada will take over the chair of the Arctic Council in May 2013, which is only a few weeks away. A number of experts who appeared before the committee talked about the serious lack of port facilities, roads and railways. It is ridiculous.

● (1725)

The government can pat itself on the back and say that it is capable of negotiating with the territories, but that is completely ridiculous because they never do any work. We have very few if any deep-water ports. We do not have any decent roads or trains that go to the north, and people cannot even get food supplies.

In committee, one witness said that, if there were a crisis or a major storm, one of the municipalities would have to be completely evacuated because there would not be any food or medication. That is completely ridiculous. It is all well and good to talk about the government's good faith and its desire to negotiate for the good of the territories, but as long as the government is not making long-term investments or providing infrastructure that will help these communities to develop, nothing will change. These communities have been neglected for decades and now the government is waking up and saying that it might be a good idea to negotiate and do something. In my opinion, that is not how things work, and Canadians do not think so either.

Land claims are extremely important. The communities were abandoned by the Conservative and Liberal federal governments. They have been abandoned for years. The government is not creating any infrastructure and does not have a long-term plan. The Conservatives are relying on band-aid solutions. They are patch-working.

We support what the government is trying to do, but it could do more. A regulatory regime is all well and good, but we know that the government deregulates everything. The government's desire to negotiate to regulate something goes against its habits. The Conservatives are deregulating when it comes to the environment and the financial system, and now they are talking about regulating. In my opinion, that does not make sense. Either the government is acting in bad faith or it does not have any idea what it is doing.

I would also like to talk about the fact that a UN report was published today on poverty in Canada's northern communities, about the fact that these communities do not have access to food, that they live in poverty and that the government has completely forgotten them. I would like to remind hon. members of something: it is all

well and good to negotiate with the territories, but this does not change anything. This should have been done about 20 years ago. Whether or not the communities agree to a pipeline or mining project is not the heart of the matter.

The heart of the matter is that the government neglected northern Canada and is now trying to put a small band-aid on a gaping wound. However, this does not hide the fact that the government has been neglecting infrastructure, food security and poverty in northern Canada and that it is still refusing to negotiate with aboriginal communities and the people living in Canada's north in order to resolve these problems.

I understand the purpose of this kind of bill. Regulations can enable northerners to make decisions and negotiate with the government. However, if the government does not negotiate in good faith, what is the point? If the government does not consult people, what is the point? Is this just an empty shell of a bill that the Conservatives hope will appease people? I would really like to know.

Today's UN report states that Canada has neglected the north. The Government of Canada neglected its own country. What do the Conservatives have to say about that? Today, not one of them has stood up and demanded that the government help northern communities. No member from Nunavut or Yukon has said anything in the House of Commons about what the territories need. Neither has the Minister of Health. I am sorry, but when negotiations are not conducted in good faith, there is no point.

We know all about the Conservatives' good faith in negotiations. They take the bosses' side, pass special laws and force workers back to work. They tell aboriginal communities that if they want to solve their problems, just talking amongst themselves should do the trick, but it will not. The government lacks both the leadership and the will to take care of Canada's north. It has no business saying that the opposition is scaring Canadians.

● (1730)

All we want the government to do is consult people and respect the rights of northern residents. I think that is pretty clear. Even the government has to admit that we are right about that.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague. I always enjoy her passionate speeches.

Throughout the day today, we have been talking about this government's poor use of the parliamentary system.

Not one of the 50 proposed amendments was accepted. The government systematically rejected them all. It could have introduced this bill long ago, but it did not. It introduced it now.

The various organizations and companies in the north are being given no time. They want to put forward amendments, convey their message and say what changes they would like to see in this bill.

I personally feel it demonstrates a lack of respect for our democracy. Could my colleague talk a bit more about that?

● (1735)

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, obviously this is important.

Government Orders

I did not have time to mention it, but my colleague from Western Arctic said that the bill should have been split into two parts because one is more controversial than the other.

Witnesses wanted more time to speak. Perhaps there were more points to explore, but the government refused all of our amendments. It was impossible to negotiate.

Once again, the government has demonstrated that it does not really want to negotiate in good faith. Keeping expert witnesses from testifying in committee in order to improve a bill clearly shows the Conservatives' contempt for our democratic institutions.

The government does not have time to negotiate because this bill has to be passed, but we are talking about northern Canada; it is important. The north has been neglected for years. If the government really wanted to improve the situation, it should have listened to us, passed our amendments and allowed us to split the bill in two to study the issues in more detail.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île.

As always I am very impressed by her passion for the topics we discuss in the House of Commons.

I think she presented some good arguments today in support of dividing this bill in two parts so that we can better examine it.

Does she think there is a chance the government will agree to this proposal?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I also admire her intelligence and her luminous spirit, which brightens up the House of Commons.

I would like to say that I believe in the Conservatives' goodwill, that I believe the Minister of Health and Minister for the Arctic Council when she says that they will look after Canada's north.

I would like to believe that, but unfortunately, we have been quite disappointed over the past two years. That is why it is important for all MPs to rise today to tell the government that enough is enough and we must work together for Canada's north.

This bill must be split in two. So we must continue to call on the government here in the House to listen to what our democratic institutions want and also what Canadians want.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passion on this issue.

We are all familiar with the challenges in Canada's north, whether we are talking about climate change, environmental protection, relations with aboriginal people in the north or natural resources development.

I would like my colleague to explain the delays we have seen in the great north, particularly when it comes to building infrastructure.

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I believe it is negligence.

It is unfortunate and sad to have to say that a government is neglecting part of the population. The fact remains that debates in the House have repeatedly demonstrated the unwillingness of past

governments and, above all, the current government. The Conservative government has been in power since 2006. It has had plenty of time to act if it really wanted to.

The north is complex, but it is part of our country's identity. I feel it is important to respect that identity. Whether the infrastructure is in Montreal, Toronto or Iqaluit makes no difference. A school or a port, it is the same thing. I do not see the problem with investing in the north or in the south of our country. To me, it is negligence, and that is really too bad.

I would like to make this little announcement: this government has not made the most investments. On the contrary, it has made the most cuts.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-47, an act to enact the Nunavut planning and project assessment act and the Northwest Territories surface rights board act.

I am going to take a minute to take a personal detour, because someone might ask why the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca is so interested in this act. The story for me begins 40 years ago. I almost hate to say that out loud. I was a young university graduate, and my first job was in Yellowknife where I had the privilege of working for the territorial government as the superintendent of treaty Indian band membership and the director of vital statistics. Suffice it to say I was way over my head for my age. I had worked in summer jobs as a health researcher and ended up in this very wonderful job in the Northwest Territories.

At that time, the Northwest Territories included Nunavut and was ruled by a commissioner appointed by the Prime Minister. It was just beginning the process of devolution and self-government. I have to say that any of us at that time would be surprised that we are still dealing with these issues 40 years later. Part of what is important about the bill is that it helps, despite its flaws, to bring us forward on those devolution questions that have certainly been dealt with the entire time of my working career.

I decided to go back to university for a graduate degree and started teaching. Then I was persuaded by a very persuasive member of Parliament to come to Ottawa for two years. I was a staff person here at the House of Commons for two years from 1981-83. I do not usually confess that. At that time it was my privilege to be attached as an NDP researcher to what was called the Indian self-government committee or the Penner committee. In that position, I was privileged to travel the entire country with the committee, listening to first nations talk about self-government and what would be needed, both in terms of laws and in terms of resources and development to achieve self-government.

Government Orders

Again, 30 years ago, those who participated in that commission would be very surprised that we would still be standing here talking about and dealing with the same issues, the same lack of resources and the same lack of respect for first nations self-government in this country. Yes, progress is a long road not yet finished.

After having spent two years in Ottawa, I returned to British Columbia because it is hard to keep a British Columbian in Ottawa for more than two years, and the weather outside certainly speaks to that again today. However, when I went back to British Columbia I was involved with a small non-government organization until the time I was elected to Parliament, called Pacific Peoples' Partnership. That non-government organization attempts to build relationships between indigenous people around the Pacific and first nations in Canada, because indigenous peoples all around the Pacific Rim face many of the same problems. Whether we are talking about Australia, New Zealand or Pacific islanders, many of the same problems exist in getting the outsiders, the colonists, to recognize rights and responsibilities they have to first nations.

One could say all of my life I have been involved as a supporter in these issues, not so directly as some of my colleagues here, like the member who spoke earlier, but certainly I remain very interested in these issues.

When I look at the bill, the first thing I would say is, having separated the two territories and having quite different issues, it is a surprise to find them jammed together into the same bill. That may be efficient for Conservative legislative purposes, but it is not efficient for consulting the public and for getting meaningful input from the communities and for separating out those important issues that need to be debated both here in Parliament and at the community level. We would have been far better served with two bills and with a separate consultation process at the local level for both of these bills.

I am also disappointed at the failure of the government to respond to the many amendments that were put forward. Members on the other side have referred to them as the opposition amendments. Yes, it is true we moved them in the House of Commons, but those amendments came from all across the north. They came from northern organizations, which pointed out significant flaws in this legislation, groups like the Nunavut Impact Review Board, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., NWT Association of Communities, NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines and Alternatives North. That is where we got the ideas for these amendments, not things to hold up government business, not things we dreamt up by ourselves, but things that came about from listening to northerners about what needs to happen in the north.

● (1745)

It is hard to understand how many of these very practical solutions could be ignored or rejected by the government. There is an example in this bill of what happens when there is not adequate consultation and when opinions of northerners are not taken account. In 1994, the Yukon land claims agreement was implemented. Now we have amendments in this bill, thrown in with the other two territories, to correct the problems that have existed since 1994 in trying to bring about fulfillment of the federal government's obligations under the Yukon umbrella final agreement.

Why do we have those amendments in the bill? I would argue it is because at that time a different government, a Liberal government, also failed to listen to northerners about all the things that were necessary to implement full recognition of first nations land and treaty rights, and also the devolution of self-government into the territories.

The other reason that I remain interested in this as a member of Parliament is the fact that I have five first nations in my riding. I want to take a little detour into what is happening with land claims and with development issues for the first nations in my riding.

At the far western end of my riding is a first nation called Pacheedaht, led very ably by Chief Marvin McClurg. It is a relatively small first nation, with 259 members. They are in the process, under the B.C. Treaty Commission, of negotiating a settlement to their claims. They are at a common table with the Ditidaht First Nation with whom they share the Nuu-chah-nulth language and culture, but they are not part of the larger Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council.

These two small first nations, with very limited resources, are attempting to work their way through this treaty process. They are now in stage four of the six-stage process. They are at the stage of negotiating an agreement in principle. They are focusing on things like parks and protected areas, and recognition of the rights of first nations to hunt and fish in those parks and protected areas. They are also focused on wildlife, migratory birds and fish.

The Pacheedaht, in the meantime, while they are negotiating what we hope will be a final agreement, have become very involved in forestry economic development initiatives. Right now they actually run a wood lot licence, in the San Juan River area, which is very close to their reserve.

The point I am making is that it is the first nations who have created the most jobs in that part of my riding. It is the first nations initiatives in forestry that have put people to work. It is not just first nations people but everybody in that end of my riding who have benefited from the recognition of giving back the woodlot to the Pacheedaht First Nation.

In what I would call the middle of my riding, we have three first nations who are working together in an alliance called the Te'Mexw Treaty Association. These three nations were all signatories to the Douglas Treaties, but they decided there would be a benefit for their nation in negotiating a comprehensive and modern treaty that dealt not just with land issues but with governance issues as well. These are first nations with somewhat larger resources, larger memberships, but, again, they do not really belong to any tribal council. They have come together with two first nations from outside my riding, the Malahat First Nation and the Nanoose First Nation, to form the Te'Mexw Treaty Association.

Government Orders

The largest of these is the T'Sou-ke Nation, located near what we in English call Sooke, led by Chief Gordon Planes. Again, while trying to negotiate a settlement and implement a treaty, they have embarked on a very interesting initiative in the T'Sou-ke First Nation. They had a visioning exercise with their leaders, and their leaders said they wanted to go back to the days when they were self-sufficient, independent and able to stand on their own. They have embarked on what I think is probably the largest solar power initiative in the province of British Columbia. They have proceeded to install solar power on the reserve and will eventually, and in not very much longer, take themselves off the grid and be producing their own power.

What they did in doing that was to train first nations people as solar technicians. They are now supplying services to the surrounding community and helping other people make that transition to renewable and sustainable energy. That is another very good example of what we have to learn in this process of recognizing first nations rights to self-government, and to land and resources, and how much all of our communities could benefit from that.

• (1750)

The third first nation in my riding is the Scia'new First Nation, led by Russell Chipps. They are very much involved in attempting to create employment on reserve by taking advantage of the rural economy around them, where many of the non-first nation people are involved in what we might call hobby farms. They are having trouble finding ways to process the products they are raising. Therefore, there is a very good partnership developing between the Scia'new First Nation and the municipality of Metchosin in an attempt to develop agricultural processing industries that will take things being raised on the hobby farms and make jobs on the reserve for both first nation and non-first nation people.

The fourth first nation in my riding, the Songhees First Nation, is the largest and is located very much in the city. It consists of 547 band members who, unfortunately, lost their long-term and very distinguished chief just less than a year ago.

Again, I want to talk about the vision they had. While trying to get a land claim solved and trying to get the resources they need, they have embarked upon the construction of a very large wellness centre. The wellness centre is going to focus on addiction treatments, recreation and all those things to help people recover, in the first nation, both their sense of selves and their sense of culture.

However, to finish the wellness centre, to finish those jobs in the Scia'new First Nation on the reserve and to finish those initiatives that the T'Sou-Ke has taken, they need to get a comprehensive treaty settlement underway.

We were very happy to see, last week, the announcement of an incremental or an interim treaty agreement that has transferred some land in the interim and some resources in the interim. Again, they are at stage four of the six-stage treaty process, but we have those interim transfers of land and resources.

One of the concerns in my riding has been about a very prominent site in the municipality of Esquimalt, a very prominent corner, where

that land has now been transferred to the Songhees First Nation under the interim agreement.

I think it is important for people to realize that in the interim the resources that were transferred have been transferred in fee simple, and so the development that is bound to take place on that corner would be under the same zoning laws, the same regulations and, as any other landowner, they will pay municipal taxes and will receive municipal services.

However, once again it is an important spur to redevelopment of downtown Esquimalt, or the Esquimalt village as it is known, and this is being pursued by first nations under the interim agreement.

The last first nation in my riding is called Esquimalt First Nation, led by a chief I very much respect, Chief Andy Thomas. Esquimalt First Nation has decided not to be part of the treaty commission process. Instead, it has pointed to the Douglas Treaty, saying, "We already have a treaty and that treaty has been ignored". There has been a failure. There was a failure, at the time, by the colonial government to survey the lands promised, to set aside those lands and to protect those treaty lands. Then, as time went on, those lands were alienated to third parties.

There was a second failure under the Douglas Treaty for the Esquimalt Nation, and that was a failure to pay any compensation when those lands were transferred to third parties.

Therefore, for Chief Thomas, the treaty process is not a new process but very much a question of unfinished business.

That brings me back to the bill we have in front of us today. What it is really dealing with is unfinished business, whether it is the Yukon land claims for which the final settlement needs some amendments, whether it is the Nunavut planning and project assessment act or the Northwest Territories surface rights board act.

Despite our concerns about the failures of the Conservatives to recognize the necessity for amendments to the bill, we will be supporting the bill, as we know that would mean a similar bill will eventually come back to the House of Commons and those 50 amendments will eventually be dealt with in this place. They are necessary to implement the treaty agreements; they are necessary to get on with the business of creating jobs and development for everyone in the north, not just first nations but all residents of the north. We know that when the north prospers, the rest of Canada will also prosper.

• (1755)

I am sad to say I look forward to the day when there is a different government that will bring in the bill and bring back the amendments, which will be a chance to listen to the voices of northerners and first nations people and actually accomplish their goals in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take issue with what the member said in his closing remarks. I am from northern Canada. I grew up in Fort McMurray. The national resource industry is hugely successful because of the involvement of aboriginal Canadians as well as others. This government is investing in ensuring there is opportunity there, unlike the NDP that seems to have a different approach to this, especially when dealing with our American colleagues.

The one issue I would like to take up with the member opposite is with respect to consultation. The member was outlining how we had not been consulting. We have gone through a number of steps in this bill, whether that be providing adequate notice, meeting with aboriginal groups and governments, considering their feedback and incorporating it into the bill or accommodating various interests. In fact, there has been a 10-year process on part one and there will be another two-year process with respect to part two.

Why do the New Democrats not support our natural resources industry and the growth of it? Why do they continue to tell the Americans that they are not supporting our natural resources industry? Also, why do they not seem to comprehend that 10 years of consultation is enough and we need to take action now?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the member asked several questions. Obviously the NDP supports the development of resource industries when it is done in a sustainable fashion. That is the question we are always raising in the House of Commons, whether it is something that will benefit us down the road and if the development is bearing its full costs in terms of its impacts on the environment.

With regard to the resource developments in northern Alberta that she pointed to, she may also like to listen to some of the people who live downstream from them in the Northwest Territories. They are very concerned about the environmental impacts of dumping into the streams and rivers that flow to the north, which were previously pristine. Yes, the New Democrats support development, but it has to bear its costs. The polluters have to pay and it has to be sustainable.

In terms of consultation, I think inadvertently the member betrays something about the government. For the government, consultation is the process, not the outcome. It says, "We talked to you for 10 years, but, of course, we didn't listen, so now we'll proceed". Consultation means considering the 50 amendments the New Democrats brought forward and actually acting on them, not just going through a process where people do not get to say what they think—

Ms. Kellie Leitch: We're listening to the people in the territories.

Mr. Randall Garrison: The hon. member can ask another question if she likes, but it indicates a problem when none of the things that were raised in the north were actually incorporated in the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how interesting that the debate has come around to economic development. My question is about sustainable development.

Government members talk about Canada's prosperity, economic development and so on, but does this document contain a genuine vision for sustainable development?

There are two aspects to sustainable development. First, there is the environment, because permafrost and other factors call for different construction techniques in the north than elsewhere. Second, social factors and the people who live in the north are also very important.

Can my colleague comment on these aspects?

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, what I learned long ago when I lived in the north, and it almost cited so many times to become trite, was that we could trust first nations to think about sustainable development. One of my favourite chiefs in Port Alberni used to say, "If you sign a settlement with us, we're not looking for money to move to Hawaii. We're looking to build a stronger community here where we live that will last for generations and generations to come". By devolving powers to Nunavut and recognizing first nations' rights to land and self-government, I have complete confidence that sustainability will be taken into account in the developments that take place in the future, not just economic sustainability but, as the hon. member said, the important aspect of social sustainability.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that my colleague is talking about the right to self-governance, but what about the right to affordable housing or to food? When it comes to the north, we are not just talking about governance, but the whole issue of neglect that the government refuses to deal with.

I would like my colleague to speak more about the fact that negotiation must be done in good faith, and it is not just by introducing a bill that every problem will magically disappear.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, there is an important link between the issues the member raises and the questions of self-government for first nations. It was not first nations that developed the system whereby we end up with hungry children in first nations communities; it is the failure of Canada to recognize the right to self-government and that the right to self-government requires resources to go along with it. When we provide the recognition of the right to self-government and we provide resources, first nations communities will prosper and there will not be hungry kids in first nations communities. The member is right: decisions made at a distance, which may look good on a piece of paper drawn up by the bureaucrats here in Ottawa, do not actually work in those rural or northern communities.

Part of the bill goes a way toward recognizing that is what we need to do to solve these problems. We need to get the decision-making closest to those people who have the problems so that we get solutions that are actually effective in those communities.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech and I wish to congratulate him, because I learned a lot.

I have a question for him regarding consultation. During the committee meetings, we pointed out that the bill would have been improved if it had been divided into two, with one part dealing with Nunavut and the other with the Northwest Territories. The bill before us reminds me of this government's mammoth budget implementation bills.

Could the member speak to us about parliamentary consultation and the fact that the bill would have been better if it were spilt into two?

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with two things here. One is the fact that it tries to put Nunavut and the Northwest Territories together. They are completely different situations, so in terms of consultation, we could have identified the issues in Nunavut much more clearly if there were a single bill and we had actually carried out a consultation process just about that.

In the Northwest Territories, the situation is much more difficult because there are people who have land claim settlements in place and people who have not yet concluded those settlements. Therefore, inside that separate bill we almost need two separate consultation processes to deal with those two very different situations.

The link I was making to the first nations in my riding is that we are going to come across these very same issues in British Columbia, where we are busy signing treaties. However, to implement those treaties and to make sure they are effective raises some of the very same questions and concerns that are raised by the bill.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for not only a very cogent speech but very cogent answers to very complex questions.

The question I would like to put to him is this: when is consultation actually consultation? Of course, that is the question of the day for first nation peoples. There has been lots of discussion and the government has been saying that it has thoroughly consulted. The people of Nunavut and some of the first nations in the Northwest Territories said they were consulted. However, the constitutional duty goes much further. I wonder if the member would like to elaborate on the idea that the duty goes far beyond consultation to also seriously consider and then to accommodate those asks.

• (1805)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona for her question. She knows far more about these issues than I do.

In terms of the duty to consult, we run across this issue with both the federal and the provincial governments all the time in British Columbia, where duty to consult means the duty to ask questions only and not to listen to the answers. If they do listen to the answers, the duty stops there; it is not a duty to consider the impacts of those answers and to actually make accommodations that will guarantee that first nations' rights are recognized and respected in a meaningful

manner and not just in a kind of drive-by consultation whereby someone shouts out the window, "What do you think?" and then continues on their merry way down the same highway.

What it really requires is talking together and working together with people to find a new path that will accommodate the best interests of all those involved in the process.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member who spoke before me. I particularly liked his expression near the end of his last question about drive-by consultation. If the definition of Conservative consultation is lowering the window and asking what people think, then he is pretty well dead on the money.

I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-47, an act to enact the Nunavut planning and project assessment act and the Northwest Territories surface rights board act and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts. The short title is the northern jobs and growth act.

Why is the member of Parliament for Newfoundland and Labrador, from the great riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl, speaking to a bill for the Northwest Territories? I feel that the Labrador part of my province has a lot in common with the Northwest Territories. Labrador is a relatively untamed land. Labrador is a vast land. Labrador is known as the big land. Labrador is rich in minerals, ore and precious metals. Labrador is under constant exploration and development. Labrador's environment is under constant pressure, be it from renewable hydro development or from new mines. We must be vigilant to ensure that there is balance between development and the impact on the environment. We must ensure that there is balance in everything. The north must also be vigilant.

This legislation is far from perfect. We wanted to amend the bill at committee with changes based on witness testimony, but all 50 opposition amendments were voted down. The Conservatives ruled the amendments out of order. There were 50 NDP amendments and three Liberal amendments. I will come back to that in just a moment.

The bill packages together two bills that should be considered separately. The first bill, the Nunavut planning and project assessment act, is pretty well a straightforward implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Simply put, it would improve regulatory regimes in the north. It would create a more efficient, more predictable regulatory regime. The roles, powers, functions and authorities of all parties, including how the members are appointed, would be clearly defined. These parties include the Nunavut Planning Commission, the Nunavut Impact Review Board, Inuit groups and governments.

The act requires that Inuit and the Government of Canada establish a joint system to oversee the way resources are managed in the territory. I like the sound of a joint system or joint management. There have been calls in recent years for joint management of the east coast fisheries, for example, but I will not get into that right now. Give me time.

Government Orders

The second part of the bill is the Northwest Territories surface rights board act, and it is more complicated. It would implement sections of three aboriginal land claims agreements, but the board would apply to all parts of the Northwest Territories. The board would receive applications from one or both parties to a dispute when a negotiated access agreement could not be reached. A panel of the board would then conduct a hearing and would determine the compensation, if there was to be compensation, and terms and conditions related to access. The board would then make an order containing the terms and conditions by which access could be exercised and any compensation payable for that access. When making its decision, the board would take into account market value, loss of use, effect on wildlife, damage, nuisance or inconvenience and cultural attachment.

The Mining Association of Canada welcomes this legislation, particularly the inclusion of the Nunavut planning and project assessment act. The association says that it would help spur more responsible mining projects in the territory, which currently has one operating mine. This legislation would result in a framework to determine how environmental assessment and permanent processes in Nunavut will proceed as new land use plans for the territory come forward, and they will most definitely come forward.

• (1810)

I have a quote from Pierre Gratton, president and CEO of the Mining Association of Canada:

The legislation comes at a critical time for Nunavut, with its promising mineral potential and opportunities for economic development never before seen in the territory's history.

Here is another quote from Mr. Gratton:

By providing clarity and certainty around the regulatory framework, this new legislation will help give industry the confidence it needs to move forward with development decisions.

The key word there is “confidence”. Over the next decade, the Mining Association of Canada estimates that new mine development across the north could bring more than \$8 billion of investment to Nunavut. That could translate into some 4,500 new jobs and a significant increase in local business development.

Mining is the largest private sector contributor in the north, making up 29% of the gross domestic product of the Northwest Territories. However, mining is also a boom and bust industry. The people of Labrador would tell us that.

There are 45,000 northerners in the Northwest Territories. In Labrador, there are just over 26,000 people. They are both vast lands with few people, but we must ensure that the people benefit. We must ensure that the industries thrive. We must also ensure that the impact on the environment is minimal.

Mining has incredible ups and incredible downs, depending on the price of ore or on world markets. I mentioned earlier in my speech about the amendments we proposed to the bill, the 50 NDP amendments, the 50 suggestions from northerners, which were all voted down, each and every one, by the Conservatives.

The proposed amendments included having the bill reviewed after five years. The amendments included creating a participant funding process and having hearings of the various boards and commissions

held in public. One amendment in particular tried to change the language around appointments to the boards, which held that representatives must have knowledge of the land, knowledge of the environment and traditional knowledge.

The great MP for Western Arctic, whom we heard earlier today, said that all representatives should meet all three requirements: knowledge of the land, knowledge of the environment and traditional knowledge. That did not happen. Those amendments were not adopted, despite the best efforts of the New Democrats, the opposition. However, we still support this legislation.

There are three points with which I want to wrap up.

Do I have one minute left, two minutes, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): You have eleven minutes left.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I forgot to say at the beginning of my speech that I will be splitting my time. I am told that Phil Toone would be happy to fill in for the second ten minutes.

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine will be taking the second part of the time.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: There are three points with which I want to wrap up, Mr. Speaker. First, the New Democrats support consultation and consensus-based decision-making that respects the autonomy of the Government of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Second, more consultation should have been allowed under Northwest Territories surface rights board act.

Third, New Democrats, led by the member of Parliament for Western Arctic, will continue to fight for the rights of northerners and the long-term prosperity of northern communities.

Let me be clear. The New Democrats support the bill. We will vote for the bill because the intent is there and the intention is good. The bottom line is that New Democrats do not want to get in the middle of this agreement that the Government of Nunavut has negotiated. However, my party is concerned about the Northwest Territories surface rights board act and the fact that the act may have been rushed. That is why the series of the more than 50 amendments that we put forward were so important.

The Conservatives used their majority on the committee to block all those amendments: again, that the bill would be reviewed in five years, that a participant funding process would be created and that hearings would be held on the various boards and commissions in public.

How often does that happen, that the Conservatives—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member may have to get those last few points in during the course of questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague will have an opportunity to finish his remarks.

We proposed 50 amendments, and they were all rejected by the government. This bill is years in the making, and it is urgent that we pass it today. There are people in the north who know what the reality is, who are worried, who want their message to be heard and who want amendments to the bill.

Is my colleague also concerned about the lack of time? Will the government respect our parliamentary system?

[English]

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the most important of those 50 amendments that our party brought forward are as follows.

The first was that the bill would be reviewed after five years. That was very important. From my perspective, that was common sense and absolutely reasonable.

The second was that the hearings of the various boards and commissions would be held in public. I also look at that as common sense.

In terms of what will happen with respect to these amendments, as the hon. member who spoke just before me mentioned, when our party is in government in 2015, that will be the opportunity to take a second look at some of these amendments to see what we can do then.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

• (1820)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is at risk of significant climatic dangers, including floods, hail storms, ice storms, tornados, wind storms and geological

hazards, such as earthquakes and related fires. The 1998 ice storm cost \$5.4 billion, and the 1996 Saguenay flood cost \$1.7 billion. However, these claims pale in comparison to the losses that could result from a major earthquake and related fires in British Columbia, Ontario or Quebec. The potential economic damage from a major seismic event in British Columbia alone is estimated at \$30 billion.

Despite the potential loss of human life, damage to businesses and communities and the enormous economic losses, the Minister of Public Safety refused to answer any of my written questions regarding disaster preparedness, response, recovery and resilience, which are clearly issues of fundamental importance to the health and safety of Canadians.

Canadians will remember the most expensive natural disaster in our history, when an astounding 80 hours of freezing rain coated Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. The 1998 ice storm downed 130 power transmission towers and 30,000 utility poles. Over four million Canadians lost power, and 600,000 were forced to leave their homes.

This past July, I was honoured to be appointed as one of a handful of parliamentary champions from around the world by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. In September I submitted two detailed written questions to the government focusing on disasters in Canada and our liabilities as taxpayers, as Canada has real risk. For drought, almost 620,000 are at risk. For flooding, it is almost 50,000. For earthquake, it is 34,000. For a tsunami, 165,000 are at risk.

I asked the minister questions on specifically where Canada was lacking in terms of disaster preparedness, response and recovery and what would be needed in terms of funding, human resources and operational requirements going forward. However, instead of answering either of my two written questions, the minister provided two-sentence responses explaining that my questions required “extensive manual research and analysis”. This is simply not good enough when the issue is a matter of public safety and it is within the minister's purview.

When I later questioned the minister in the House regarding his refusal to answer my written questions, the minister simply ducked, saying it would cost the taxpayer in excess of \$1,300 just to examine whether an answer was possible. What would be the price tag of an under-prepared government facing the next disaster?

Is this new government policy to cost out each written question before answering, or was this a deliberate attempt by a government to avoid answering questions for which it largely has no answers?

As the leader of our party said, “So you have to ask yourself the question if it costs so much to get that information, that means they don't have it. And if they don't have it, there's a real problem”.

As disappointing as it is that the minister chooses not to meet his own government's accountability guidelines, it is absolutely objectionable that he refuses to answer questions of profound significance to Canadians, particularly those living in disaster-prone areas.

Adjournment Proceedings

Disasters do not have to happen. It is the job of the minister not to duck questions but to give Canadians real information and to ensure that Canada is a disaster-resilient nation and that we can all take action to reduce our risk.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the government's top priorities is ensuring the safety and security of all Canadians, and that includes keeping Canadians safe from all kinds of disasters. Every year, there are natural disasters that occur in Canada. We have recently seen floods in Manitoba, landslides in British Columbia, forest fires in many regions, in fact, even a landslide in my own riding of Simcoe—Grey. We were all aware of the devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy in the eastern seaboard of the United States. That is why disaster risk reduction and building resilient communities are such an important priority for our government.

Public Safety Canada is responsible for providing leadership and coordination for emergency management activities within the federal government and in collaboration with the provinces and territories, international partners and other stakeholders. The Department of Public Safety works extensively with these key stakeholders on initiatives related to the four pillars of emergency management: prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response and recovery.

Disaster risk reduction is a concept designed to directly support the four pillars approach by analyzing and addressing the underlying risk factors that can lead to disasters. The government previously participated in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which was organized by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. At this conference, 168 countries, including Canada, adopted the “Hyogo Framework for Action”. The role of the framework is to promote a strategic and systematic approach to reducing vulnerabilities and risks to hazards and underscores the need and means for building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

In 2009 our government established Canada's platform for disaster risk reduction as part of Canada's commitment to deliver on the Hyogo framework. Canada's platform brings together multidisciplinary stakeholders with the goal of promoting safer and more resilient Canadian communities, including advancing work to reduce risk of vulnerability and impacts of disasters for Canadians, leveraging existing networks to enhance coordination of disaster risk reduction across sectors and enhancing knowledge and information sharing.

Since 2010, Canada's platform has held an annual round table on disaster risk reduction to engage all sectors of society and individual Canadians on ways to foster disaster risk reduction at all levels across the country. The most recent round table took place in October 2012 and it had some 200 participants, representing all sectors, including governments, businesses, NGOs, aboriginal groups and academics.

In accordance with our commitment under the Hyogo framework for action, Canada has also agreed to provide a biannual review of the progress achieved in the implementation of disaster risk reduction activities at a national level. Submitted in 2011, Canada's most recent reporting covered the period of 2009 to 2011.

The member's question that came in the form of a written question regarding disaster risk has been answered and has been subject to a ruling by the Speaker. As was mentioned by the minister and also by my colleagues, the question would have cost Canadian taxpayers in excess of \$1,300 just to examine whether the question was possible. In order to answer the 55 sub-questions, it would have cost an untold tens of thousands of dollars.

I can assure the member that Canada's 2011 to 2013 Hyogo framework on action implementation progress report will be finalized in April 2013 and will subsequently be published for public consumption by the United Nations.

Let me assure the member that our government takes the issue of disaster risk reduction seriously. Working with all stakeholders, we will continue to promote disaster risk reduction to ensure our communities are more resilient in all types of disasters.

• (1825)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I diligently went through the government's report to the UN. Every time the government's response was lacking, I asked a question and the government refused to answer those questions. The minister should provide answers regarding: the percentage of the national budget devoted to disaster risk reduction; the current value of the government's infrastructure; the government's liabilities; and the requirements for putting in place a national alerting system that would warn Canadians of imminent or unfolding threats to life.

When a building collapses after an earthquake, while we think of it as a natural disaster that we cannot control, we can take action to reduce risk. Have earthquakes occurred in this place before? If so, should we build here in the first place? Could we build the building so it would not collapse?

Instead of shutting down legitimate questions, the government must change its thinking and act.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, strengthening resilience continues to be a priority of our government. Our government takes a comprehensive approach to resilience building, recognizing that reducing and mitigating risks is far more effective than responding after the fact. The impact of disasters worldwide in recent years reminds us of our continued need to pursue effective disaster, mitigation and risk reduction initiatives in addition to responding quickly and in a coordinated manner when disaster strikes.

That is why our government has developed the federal emergency response plan and is committed to discuss disaster mitigation with provinces and territories. We continue to be committed to the safety, security and resilience of Canadians. Supporting disaster risk reduction is just one way the Government of Canada is working to meet these commitments.

Adjournment Proceedings

● (1830)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week I asked for a more detailed answer from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Oddly enough, it was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources who stood to answer my questions. He clearly is not familiar with the file and suggested that I was changing the focus of my question. I assure the House that I was doing no such thing.

The focus of my question was how the government abandons the care of our veterans. I was struck by the words of the parliamentary secretary, because it was evident that he was unfamiliar with the file, just as it is also clear that the members opposite are not interested in caring for our veterans or making them a priority.

Back in November, I asked this question of the government:

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

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

The minister's response was that veterans can access everything online now.

It amazes me that this is the Conservatives' solution. Many veterans struggle with technology. Not everyone has access to computers or the Internet. If there is an issue, an online form is not helpful; a staff person behind a desk or on the phone is helpful. The cuts have meant that offices are closing and that wait times on the phone are getting longer and longer.

I also find it troubling that in his answers, the minister used the same old excuses for inaction by saying that it is the opposition preventing our veterans from getting faster service. Instead of actually answering the questions, the minister tried to shift blame away from himself and his caucus.

With a Conservative majority government, a government that cuts off debate at the drop of a hat, I wonder how the opposition can possibly prevent the government from acting. What we are doing is calling out the government on its poor policy, imploring it to use some sense and compassion and imploring it to treat our veterans with the respect they deserve.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources suggested that the official opposition votes against everything. That is not true. I do not vote against everything. I vote with my conscience, I vote with integrity, I vote for what is best for Canadians and for veterans.

The bills that the government has introduced to supposedly help veterans have been highly problematic and ineffective and have not made the needs of veterans a priority.

We ask veterans to put their lives on the line on foreign soil. They face great danger, risk of injury and death. They are exposed to chemicals and other hazards. They do all this in the service of our country. The very least we can do is ensure that when they come

home, they are looked after and their needs are met. They should not have to fight for long-term care. They should not have to fight in courts for their pensions. They should not be ignored.

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government has done more for veterans than this government in the last 60 years. If a veteran requires a home visit from a case manager, a veteran will continue to receive that home visit.

As the Prime Minister has demonstrated time and time again, we are providing Canada's veterans with the services and benefits they deserve in a quick and effective manner. In fact, through our Conservative government's cutting red tape for veterans initiative, we are providing veterans, Canadian armed forces personnel and their families with better and faster service in more modern ways.

We implemented the veterans transition action plan. This plan has led to more job opportunities than ever before for veterans.

We have increased accessibility of veteran services by providing 600 points of service, where previously there were only 60 points of service.

We have also launched the new benefits browser and the *My VAC Book*, which puts detailed information about veterans' benefits and services at the fingertips of veterans, so they know what benefits are available to them and their family members.

Our government recently announced that the veterans independence program will change its delivery model. Veterans will no longer have to submit numerous receipts many times a year. Instead, they will receive upfront payments for those services. Across Canada, this single change will eliminate more than 2.5 million transactions between veterans and the civil service.

Our government is also going to great lengths to help veterans with new career opportunities. Helmets to Hardhats Canada brings union, private and public sector employers together to match veterans with employment and training opportunities in the building and construction trades. Veterans Affairs Canada has enhanced employment opportunities within our department, and the Minister of Veterans Affairs has asked me to reach out to Canadian employers to invite them to offer priority hiring to our veterans. The hire a veteran initiative seeks to create many more job opportunities for Canadian armed forces personnel and veterans as they seek to move from the military to civilian careers.

Finally, I am very proud to say that our government has ended the practice of deducting veterans' disability pensions when calculating their earnings loss and Canadian armed forces income supports. We have worked quickly to make the changes to veterans benefits, to put more money in the pockets of veterans and their families.

Adjournment Proceedings

We are doing the very things that veterans have been telling us they want, and we are very proud to be delivering. Whether through the new veterans charter or the veterans transition action plan, our Conservative government remains firmly committed to providing veterans and their families with the support they need when they need it.

• (1835)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives make it sound just lovely, do they not?

I would like to ask a few more questions. What about the fact that those deductions to pension benefits only came about because veterans took the government to court? They took it to court. They had to take to the courts of this nation to get the benefits they had earned.

What about the benefits to the quadriplegic veteran we met last year in the House? This individual could not get the benefits or support he needed and the government offered him a job. He is a quadriplegic. He cannot take that job. The Conservatives' offers of jobs and work do not meet the needs of this particular individual.

What about all the denials for VIP? We have had letter after letter from veterans and their partners about the inability to get VIP. What about the widows of veterans who are called gold diggers by the government? What about the government's refusal to provide long-term care for modern-day veterans?

All of this adds up to a disrespect for veterans, and no matter what Conservatives say or what spin they put on it, our veterans are not being treated with dignity and respect.

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, there is hyperbole and then there is just pure misinformation.

As the member opposite ought to know, in fact, Veterans Affairs is going above and beyond any court-stated position on the earnings loss benefit. We are providing far more than was ever demanded of us.

Additionally, when it comes to VIP benefits or a host of other services we provide to veterans, the NDP has actually voted against all of them. Every cheque that lands on a veteran's kitchen table to pay for hydro or groceries, the NDP consistently votes against. It has even voted against providing tuition assistance to the orphans of deceased armed forces members. That is the NDP record. Anyone is welcome to look it up. It is available in black and white. I am happy to send the information to any viewers who might be watching.

Our Conservative government, by comparison, is providing more for veterans than any government in the last 60 years, and we are very proud of the support we provide to veterans. They have served our nation and we stand firmly behind them.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:39 p.m.)

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(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:54 a.m.)

Sitting Resumed

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

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