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Monday, April 29, 2013



Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 29, 2013

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER ACT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP) moved that Bill C-476, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Budget Officer), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a time when opposition members and those who are not on the government side of the House can present their ideas for improving our institutions and society by way of private members' bills.

My goal is to introduce Bill C-476 and get it passed so that our Parliamentary Budget Officer is given greater permanence and protection. We saw the need for this recently in a court decision that I will talk about later in my speech.

First, let us not forget that, before they first came to power in 2006, the theme of the Conservatives' election campaign was accountability. They told us that, if they were elected, from that point on, the government would be accountable to Parliament and to Canadians.

This plan to make government more accountable included several key components. For example, the Conservatives were going to be accountable for their budget choices by creating a neutral, credible, independent organization to provide budget information to MPs and, hence, to voters. Imagine our surprise when we learned that, as soon as they appointed Kevin Page, the first Parliamentary Budget Officer, they tried to control him, to crack down on him and to tell him what to say, as they do with all other areas of public administration.

That is the background behind what we are going to talk about. Perhaps it is not surprising, since one of the other key components of the Conservatives' plan to make government more accountable included fixed election dates, which they never respected.

The Conservatives promised that there would be a person responsible for senior-level public appointments. That person was

never appointed. Yes, the Conservatives did suggest a person of their choosing, but then they told us that, if we did not agree with their choice, there would be no one appointed to that position. No one has been appointed.

The Conservatives tried to do the same thing here, which is the root of the problem.

[*English*]

From the beginning the Conservatives promised a lot of things with regard to accountability, but unfortunately, whether it was with regard to fixed date elections, which they have never respected, or with regard to an appointments officer, who was going to help us make appointments at the highest level and find the best person instead of the best member of the party of the government, that has gone by the wayside.

What we are about to see in a little demonstration is what happened to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who was supposed to be a bit like the congressional budget officer in the U.S., highly respected and credible. There is so much respect for the institution even when people do not agree. We should not look to the Conservatives for respect for institutions in any way, shape or form.

The Conservatives wanted someone who would repeat their talking points, then they met Kevin Page. They did not count on somebody who intended to actually do his job and would expose Conservative economic incompetence, one of their strong suits. Kevin Page looked at the 2008 economic and fiscal update. Even in the face of an economic crisis, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance insisted there would be no deficit. Kevin Page said that was not plausible. It turned out that we had the largest deficit in Canadian history.

We must not forget that the proposed purchase of the F-35s was the greatest fiasco in military procurement history in Canada. Even as costs soared, the Conservatives insisted that the total cost of the planes would be \$17.6 billion. In his 2012 report, Kevin Page said it would be closer to \$29.3 billion. In fact, it was even higher than that. The Conservatives attacked him viciously when he came out with those reports. It was very personal because he refused to take the Conservative talking points.

Private Members' Business

The Conservatives claimed that OAS was unaffordable and raised the eligibility age to 67, taking nearly \$13,000 out of the pockets of seniors. What was interesting for us was that the Prime Minister courageously made that announcement at a conference of billionaires in the Swiss Alps. We continue to invite the Prime Minister to go to Timmins or Sudbury and tell hardrock miners there that they have not worked hard enough in their life and he is going to take \$13,000 out of their pockets and make them work to age 67. The PBO report contradicted the government again, proving that the current OAS system is absolutely sustainable, as everybody else who looked at it has concluded.

The list goes on.

The Conservatives led the public into error with the cost of the war in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

They tried to fool the public regarding the real cost of their approach to crime.

The most extraordinary sham they perpetrated recently has to do with infrastructure costs. When they tabled the budget, they had the audacity to say they were going to increase infrastructure spending.

Our team proved to journalists that that was completely false. Instead, the Conservatives cut billions of dollars and eliminated tens of thousands of jobs. Actually, they are very good at that. I must give credit where credit is due.

As for their ability to communicate phoney numbers and statistics to journalists, it took 48 hours for everyone to realize that we were telling the truth. Fortunately, we had the Parliamentary Budget Officer to confirm everything.

• (1110)

[English]

I will never forget the minister referring to “that individual” in the House. I remember hearing him say that. It was not Kevin Page. It was not the Parliamentary Budget Officer. He did not even have a name, a title, a role, or a function. He was “that individual”. This is the Conservatives' mindset. If they cannot control it or cannot tell it what to do, it will be attacked.

It is interesting for us that in the current process we have someone now occupying that role on an interim basis who has followed through on some of the things; for example, listening to the court decision that said that the PBO was allowed to require government departments and agencies to produce full reports. However, that has not stopped the Conservatives.

This whole selection process is contrary to what happened the first time. In the first go-round, I was the NDP's finance critic. I was consulted by the government. I had a chance to interview and meet with Kevin Page. We gave our approval to his appointment. The Conservatives knew they were not going to renew him. They have never talked to us since. To this day, we have not been consulted for one second.

What is also coming out of the selection process is—a good French expression for it is *un concours “paqueté”*. They know in

advance who they are putting into that job. They are going through the motions now of pretending to hire someone.

The Conservatives have no interest whatsoever in accountability. The reality is the Conservatives never wanted accountability and never wanted to give Canadians a better understanding of how public money is being spent. They wanted a sympathetic ear, someone to prop up their misguided spending plans. The finance minister said, word for word in January, that he hoped that the PBO would be “...a sounding board, a testing board” for government policies.

Conservatives knew that Kevin Page's mandate was ending in March and they made no effort to find a qualified replacement. They refused to extend his term until a suitable candidate could be found. Now we are left without a full-time parliamentary budget officer. That is the hypocrisy of the Conservatives.

This is what we are trying to fix with Bill C-476. We want to have, not just a parliamentary budget officer, but a parliamentary budget office. We want to make sure that we protect it and the PBO becomes an officer of Parliament so that there could no longer be the type of interference that the Conservatives tried. Not that they got away with it with Kevin Page. They seriously underestimated the man. However, we are going to make sure that no other government would be able to do that, that both sides of the House, whether a backbencher on the government side, a member of any of the opposition parties, or an independent MP would be allowed full access to objective information.

[Translation]

It is critically important that we have this position and this individual who is responsible for keeping the government accountable in the public interest. If we do not have complete and accurate information, how can we make the most important decisions that are incumbent upon us on how to spend public funds? That is the whole idea.

What is fascinating is the fact that the Conservatives were honest when they proposed the position. I sincerely believe that. However, it is surprising to see them so willing to repeat nonsense day in and day out. Conservative members read the documents that are given to them, without stopping to think for one second about the glaring contradiction between what they promised in terms of responsibility and accountability and what they are actually doing.

Nevertheless, we in the NDP are here to remind the public that the Conservatives are being incredibly hypocritical when they claim to want to act in the public interest and give accurate numbers.

We are proposing this legislation today in order to ensure that the Conservatives can never again interfere with the work of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

*Private Members' Business**[English]*

We would bring in amendments to the Parliament of Canada Act and would make sure that the PBO had a clear mandate that was going to be respected. Do not forget, the Conservatives had given him a clear mandate, they just tried to frustrate it every step of the way. They are turning their backs on their own legislation.

What was so interesting in Justice Harrington's ruling just a few days ago was that he reminded the Conservatives that one of the biggest mistakes we make in Canada is to take our institutions for granted. This is worth bearing in mind because there is a lot of talk about their failure to respect our institutions.

Separation of powers is in the news a lot these days. We saw one minister resign for writing a letter to the Tax Court. That follows the parliamentary tradition set down in Westminster. We saw the Minister of Finance use his ministerial letterhead to write to the CRTC and he is still sitting there. That is a failure to respect a parliamentary tradition. All of a sudden, the rules do not apply depending on which minister it is and who is involved. A rule is a rule and the rule of law is the same in Parliament as it is anywhere else. The failure by the Conservatives to respect that rule shows that they do not respect our institutions.

Let us look at what the judge said in reminding the Conservatives that they cannot just decide on their own not to listen to a law that is duly adopted by this Parliament. Justice Harrington stated:

If the majority [of the government] wants to abolish the position of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or define his or her mandate somewhat differently, so be it! However, it must do so by legislation [by law]. Having made that law by statute, it must unmake it by statute. In the meantime, Parliament has no right to ignore its own legislation.

That is the lesson they received.

The Conservatives think that they can ride roughshod over any person or institution that disagrees with them. The Federal Court confirmed the current Parliamentary Budget Officer is too important for that sort of arrogant political attack. If the Conservatives will not comply with their own law giving the PBO access to data, the courts will intervene.

• (1115)

[Translation]

We were relieved to see that even the interim Parliamentary Budget Officer is now using that ruling to order the government to provide the figures that we requested on the disastrous impact of its cuts to the various departments and agencies. The Conservatives can try all they like to rule with their blue papers that the ministers and backbenchers are reading slavishly. However, the public knows what is going on here.

The Conservatives are trying to hide the truth about their choices. Last month, 55,000 jobs were lost in Canada. When the Conservatives came to power, we had a trade surplus of \$19 billion, and we now have a deficit of \$66 billion. That is the devastating impact of how they are handling the economy.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer was telling the truth. The Conservatives were trying to hide the truth. Our bill seeks to restore the balance of power between the majority and the members.

[English]

Bill C-476 would create an independent Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, separating it from the Library of Parliament where it is now; broaden the PBO's mandate and access to relevant information; require annual reports to the House of Commons and Senate; create a streamlined non-partisan process for appointment; and ensure that the PBO is capable of understanding and working in both languages.

The Conservatives seem more content and intent on undermining our system of transparency. We know that we are capable of better, that Canadians deserve better.

[Translation]

Ever since the Conservatives came to power, they have tried to convince Canadians that they have to be happy with less. That is their approach to everything: the economy, the environment and the social sector. We know that we must fight hard for our institutions, because our entire democratic system will be lost if we let their behaviour prevail.

That is why we will always take a stand to defend our democratic institutions, whether it be the executive, the legislative or the judicial branch, so that the Canadian public continues to have a stable government.

We deserve better than the Conservative government and, in 2015, we will have better with the first NDP government in our history.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the leader of the NDP for his impassioned defence of the principle of accountability and the rule of law.

I want to remind members that when the Parliamentary Budget Officer first began accurately reporting the cost of government spending he was attacked and undermined by the government. When he spoke about austerity measures being a drag on our GDP and increasing unemployment, he was again attacked by the government.

Now we find the government's hand-picked choice for interim PBO is producing the same numbers and identifying that austerity measures brought in by this government are undermining our economy, undermining our growth and our GDP, and increasing unemployment.

Could the Leader of the Opposition comment on the recent report and on the undermining of the institution of the PBO?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, precisely because the Parliamentary Budget Officer refuses to blindly parrot the talking points of the Conservatives, of course, Kevin Page was attacked, but the Conservatives are not much happier with the interim Parliamentary Budget Officer, who is using the court decision to compel them to produce those documents.

Private Members' Business

With regard to the failure of the austerity measures of the Conservatives, let us bear in mind that contrary to what they affirmed when they first brought out their budget and were trying to get people to believe that they would increase spending on infrastructure, it took 48 hours to prove the point, as we had said from the beginning, that they were actually reducing it. Now everybody realizes that we were right. However, the Conservatives are particularly able at trying to snow people. Sometimes if enough numbers are thrown up, a number of people can be baffled.

Once the dust has settled on that exercise, though, people realize the importance of a Parliamentary Budget Officer in seeing through that type of snow job from the Conservatives, so that no parliamentarian in the future would ever have to be at the beck and call of a government that refuses to give the real numbers.

We want to strengthen the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, create a parliamentary budget office and make sure it is protected by Parliament.

• (1120)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must admit I was quite shocked at how partisan the speech was from my colleague, given the subject, but perhaps I should not have expected more than such partisan rhetoric from the opposition leader.

However, I do have a question for the opposition leader. We are talking about a private member's bill that would make the Parliamentary Budget Office its own unique office. It would be removed from the purview of the Library of Parliament.

We all know that the NDP submitted a budget without costing, which was quite interesting for Canadians to learn about. I would like to know what the cost of this private member's bill is, because there would be an increase in staffing, administration and IT costs.

I must add, as a member of the government, that we respect the parliamentary budget office's work to this end. There is a report out this morning; I look forward to reading it.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the best starting point in response to the member of Parliament for Saint Boniface is to ask her to produce the document she just said we tabled.

She just said that the NDP produced a budget. That is false. She knows its false. We know its false, but she sits there trying to send out that sort of message, knowing that what she has just said is completely false. That is the best answer for the member of Parliament for Saint Boniface.

[Translation]

I have a question for her. How can she look the constituents in Saint Boniface in the eye when she promised more accountability and transparency and the government is doing everything it can to hide the facts? How can she look the constituents in Saint Boniface in the eye when she promised fixed election dates and the government has not once complied with the legislation? How can she look the constituents in Saint Boniface in the eye and tell them that the government took the funding away from *La Liberté*, the only French-language newspaper in Manitoba? After all the promises they

made, how do they have the nerve to look their constituents in the eye? That is my question for them.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in response to the motion from the hon. member opposite on Bill C-476.

First, I see he is leaving the House at this time. He is afraid to hear what I will say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I just remind all hon. members that we do not comment on who is in or out of the chamber, coming into or leaving the chamber.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in response to the motion from the hon. member on Bill C-476, an act that would make the Parliamentary Budget Officer an officer of Parliament.

With this act, my hon. colleague opposite wants to completely change the structure and mandate of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

[Translation]

If this bill were to succeed, it would take the Parliamentary Budget Officer out of the Library of Parliament and establish the position instead as a separate officer of Parliament, with its own departmental organization and spending authorizations. My question is simply this: why do we need to change the mandate and governance structure of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer when they are serving their intended purpose?

I would like to remind the members of this House that it was this government that established this office in the first place, and making it part of the Library of Parliament was a key element of our Federal Accountability Act.

As part of the Library of Parliament, this office operates independently of the government and answers to Parliament, and it is Parliament, not the government, that approves its funding level.

• (1125)

[English]

As you know, Mr. Speaker, strengthening accountability and increasing transparency in Canada's public institutions has been a top priority of our government. Through amendments to the Lobbying Act, the Access to Information Act and other measures, the Federal Accountability Act and its accompanying action plan have made the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and public service employees more accountable than ever before in Canadian history.

We did not stop there. We recognized that parliamentarians and parliamentary committees needed access to independent, objective analysis and advice on economic and fiscal issues to better hold the government to account for its decisions. That is why we established, in part 2 of the Federal Accountability Act, the position of the Parliamentary Budget Officer within the Library of Parliament.

Private Members' Business

Its mandate is to provide independent analysis to the Senate and the House of Commons on the state of the nation's finances, the estimates of the government and trends in the national economy; to undertake research into the nation's finances and economy, and the estimates of the government when requested to do so by certain parliamentary committees; and, when requested to do so by a member or committee, to estimate the financial cost of any proposal that relates to a matter over which Parliament has jurisdiction.

[Translation]

The job of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is to give parliamentarians the information and independent analysis they need to conduct a more rigorous and informed discussion of fundamental financial and economic issues.

This, in turn, helps parliamentarians hold the government to account, and that is exactly what this officer has been mandated and resourced to do.

[English]

We may not always agree with his conclusions, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer has sparked debate and enriched the political dialogue in Canada. Regardless of whether the PBO's conclusions sometimes differ from those of the government, what is important is that Parliament now has its own objective source of analysis and research on fiscal and economic matters that is prepared independently from the government. This is a sign of the strength and maturity of our Canadian democracy.

However, the changes proposed in Bill C-476 from the hon. member opposite would have several serious impacts on this office. For example, because of the vague, broadly worded and proactive mandate proposed for the PBO, the position will become less responsive to the research and analytical needs of parliamentarians. At the same time, it will create confusion between the respective roles of the PBO and the Auditor General. We could also expect to see some duplication of functions between the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Library of Parliament and a lack of alignment between the services provided to parliamentarians. We would also very likely see an increase in the costs associated with the PBO and increased draws on the fiscal framework and government appropriations.

If this bill is passed, the office will become a separate department in its own right, with its own staffing and administrative support requirements. This means more of the PBO's funding would be devoted to bureaucracy—particularly for services such as corporate administrative support for information technology, which are currently shared with the Library of Parliament—rather than to providing services to parliamentarians.

[Translation]

The government understands the importance of accountability and transparency. That is why, when we established this office, we made it fully independent of the government in its operations and funding. I am confident that, under its current governance structure, this office will continue to play a vital role in strengthening accountability in Canada's public institutions.

● (1130)

[English]

There is an old adage that says, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Let us put this matter into perspective. Why tinker with the government's structure of the Parliamentary Budget Officer when we have economic priorities to achieve?

[Translation]

More than 900,000 net new jobs have been created in Canada since July 2009. Our priority is creating more jobs, more economic growth and more long-term prosperity for Canadians.

[English]

We are on the right track. Canadians and parliamentarians are well served by the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The Library of Parliament has launched the necessary process to find the next Parliamentary Budget Officer, and the government has appointed the current parliamentary librarian to the position on an interim basis. She will capably guide the office until the appointment of the next Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Our intention is not to remove this position from the Library of Parliament, where it has the mandate, independence and resources it needs to fulfill its mandate. Our intention is to leave well enough alone and continue focusing on creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for Canadian families.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition has introduced a bill that the Liberal caucus will have no trouble supporting, because it is something we have been calling for for a long time.

[English]

Indeed, the first motion calling for the PBO to be made an independent officer of Parliament, tabled in the House of Commons on February 3, 2009, was sponsored by our Liberal colleague, the member for Markham—Unionville. His motion also called on the government to "co-operate fully with the Parliamentary Budget Officer on all matters with respect to which he is called upon to report".

[Translation]

If that motion from February 3, 2009, had been implemented, we would all be better off. The Parliamentary Budget Officer would have been better able to do his job independently.

Better late than never, which is why the Liberal Party supports Bill C-476 and why it is urging the government to support it as well, so that it can be examined in committee. We want this bill to be examined in committee because we think it is in the best interests of the public.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer needs to have more independence and a more meaningful role. The Parliamentary Budget Officer must report directly to Parliament, without having to go through the Library of Parliament.

Private Members' Business

That said, I doubt that these changes—although they are welcome and necessary—will eliminate the hostility the Conservative government has shown for anyone who refuses to blindly sing their praises or cover up their mistakes.

What is the role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer? This person's role is to provide objective and independent analysis that may, on occasion, call into question the validity of the government's views and initiatives.

The Prime Minister cannot stand that. It has become clear that this government reacts very poorly and very aggressively to criticism and to independent thinking, whether from officers of Parliament, government scientists, foreign observers, the media or even government backbenchers.

The government would be better off keeping an open mind to these independent analyses. It might learn something that would help it fix past mistakes and avoid making new ones.

No one can deny that the Parliamentary Budget Officer produced some excellent analyses. Instead of shooting the messenger, the government should have listened to and respected what he had to say.

[*English*]

Here are some valuable PBO contributions: he analyzed the long-term cost of the Afghanistan mission; he showed how much the provincial penitentiary systems will have to pay in order to comply with the Conservatives' flawed crime agenda legislation; he produced a thorough report on the true cost of the F-35, generally considered accurate; and he proved that the old age security program was fiscally sustainable with the 65-year qualifying age, which was an assessment also echoed by the OECD.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

The government responded to these obviously credible analyses with contempt, denial and attacks, dismissing them out of hand. Of course, the government was not obliged to accept the Parliamentary Budget Officer's analyses and conclusions. The government had every right to contest them.

However, the government should then have provided its own costed, detailed analyses before taking a stand on such important issues. Before imposing its decisions on the people, a competent government would have agreed, even demanded, to have these issues studied in detail.

Does the age of eligibility for old age security need to increase from 65 to 67? That is a fundamental question. Canada is the only modern, democratic country where the government has made that type of decision without providing any serious research to back it up and without having Parliament debate it thoroughly.

Instead of profiting from such a great Parliamentary Budget Officer—whose term just ended—and instead of engaging in productive dialogue with him, the government did nothing but viciously attack him as an individual.

[*English*]

In 2009, the government tried to cut the PBO funding by \$1.3 million, one-third of the total budget. Public pressure eventually forced the government to find that money through the estimates.

In March of 2010, the PBO published a report showing the government would not balance the budget in 2014-15. The finance minister dismissed the PBO as wrong, but was unable or unwilling to provide any analysis to substantiate this rejection of the PBO's projections. Today, we all know that it is the finance minister who proved himself wrong.

When the PBO published a document showing the old age security program was sustainable in February of 2012, the Minister of Finance called Kevin Page unbelievable, unreliable and incredible.

Conservative senators moved to find Kevin Page in contempt for using the courts to access government spending data. The government refused to give Kevin Page information to which he is legally entitled under the Parliament of Canada Act. The government changed the PBO job vacancy notice in order to find someone ready to make compromises. Compromises?

[*Translation*]

Should someone compromise the truth? Should someone compromise in an effort to please the government and help cover up its mistakes? Should someone compromise on what should be disclosed to or hidden from the public, from taxpayers? It is not the Parliamentary Budget Officer's job to fiddle with the numbers or mask reality. His role is to produce precise, rigorous, uncompromising analyses.

What can we expect from a government that will not stop undermining the Parliamentary Budget Officer along with every other aspect of parliamentary democracy?

[*English*]

The government and the Prime Minister have never ceased to abuse the Parliament of Canadians. In 2008, they broke their own law on fixed election dates. They prorogued Parliament twice in order to circumvent the Commons, and they refused to hand over the F-35 documents despite a House order. They used time allocation or closure 32 times since the 2011 election. They forced committees to meet in camera, hidden from the public, for important debates and witness selection. They made improper use of omnibus budget bills to alter acts of Parliament that had little to do with the budget. They attacked the Veterans Ombudsman. Then we had Bev Oda misleading Parliament on the serious question of who altered a federal document.

[*Translation*]

Faced with a government that openly displays such contempt for parliamentary democracy, that refuses to hear any criticism, that is so suspicious of independent thought and is so afraid of the truth, any measures to help strengthen our Canadian parliamentary institutions deserve our attention.

Private Members' Business

That is why Bill C-476 should be examined, supported in principle and thoroughly scrutinized in committee. In addition to being very useful for the future of the parliamentary budget office, which is a new institution, the debate on this bill and all the questions it raises could—or so we hope—incite the government to really think about the true meaning of parliamentary democracy.

• (1140)

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak once again about the position of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I will just remind my colleagues and Canadians that this is a position created by the Conservative government. It was created in the wake of the Liberal sponsorship scandal, at a time when Canadians were incensed by the misappropriation of their tax dollars.

People feel squeezed; their incomes have not been rising. Canadians want to know that the government treats every dollar they send to Ottawa with respect, and they want to see what is happening with their tax dollars.

Therefore, the Federal Accountability Act was something championed by the Conservatives. They rode into Ottawa on their enthusiasm for accountability. They promised fixed election dates so that elections could not be fixed around a time when a particular party had the best advantage. They wanted public appointments to be more transparent, not just a political reward for friends, and they wanted transparency in budgeting.

We have seen what a failure all aspects of this Federal Accountability Act have been under the leadership of the Conservatives. Their fixed election dates have had some flexibility, shall we say, in recent history. The head of public appointments was a position that was announced, never created and subsequently abandoned, and we know why. It is because, of course, appointments have remained in the sphere of pure partisanship under the Conservative government. Lastly, the transparency promised through the Parliamentary Budget Officer, which we supported, has in fact given way to opacity and less transparency in budgeting, probably less transparency than we have ever seen before, and the position of the Parliamentary Budget Officer has been undermined and significantly reduced in scope from what the Conservatives had promised.

However, let us take a look at what the Parliamentary Budget Officer shone a light on in his time in existence. He was the first to begin to analyze the real long-term costs of Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan, and that significantly influenced the public debate here in this country.

He began to analyze, and shone a light on, the cost of the Conservatives' crime legislation and what that would mean not only for the federal government but for provincial governments across this country, the real cost of that crime legislation.

Regarding the F-35s, it was the Parliamentary Budget Officer who really added some hard numbers to the true cost of the F-35 procurement and showed that the numbers the government was putting forward were truly in the realm of fantasy, in that the true

cost of the F-35s would be many times more than what the government was publicly announcing.

The PBO also highlighted that the changes to OAS announced by the current government would mean that Canadians would have to keep working two more years before accessing their old age security. The Prime Minister, with all the courage he could muster from his perch with billionaires surrounding him in Davos, announced and then implemented the changes through one of his obscure budget implementation acts, to the detriment of hard-working Canadians who will have to work two years longer to access their pension benefits for old age security. However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer showed that OAS was indeed tenable, that it was indeed sustainable and that these changes were completely unnecessary, which showed that Canada just felt it needed to be with other governments around the world that were delaying old age security benefits.

• (1145)

The Parliamentary Budget Officer also showed the terrible impact of the government's austerity measures, how the impact would be in fact a drag on our gross domestic product, how these measures were undermining growth, increasing unemployment, and damaging the services and programs Canadians relied on.

What was fascinating was that he was unable to even get the information necessary to do his analysis. As someone who was in a position created to guarantee transparency and budgeting for Canadians, even the Parliamentary Budget Officer was unable to get the data, the information he needed to do his analysis.

He provided incredible information to Canadians, nonetheless, for which he was personally attacked by the government, and his work was undermined. Frankly, it was embarrassing that the government would undermine a public position in this way, especially a position it had fought for and created.

I want to just take a moment and pay tribute to the past PBO, Kevin Page. I do believe Canadians recognized his courage and the importance of the work he has done for Canadians. He stood up to the government; he spoke truth to power. I believe he brings forward the best of the public service and the credibility of independent advice that the position must maintain. We thank him for it.

This position is not just about an individual. Of course it is about the bigger question of transparency and democratic accountability in our finances. What is fascinating is that the hand-picked interim PBO, who is now occupying this position on a part-time basis, has just released a report in which she has reaffirmed many of the numbers and the analysis that the previous PBO had drawn Canadians' attention to.

Private Members' Business

She, once again, shows how the government's reckless cuts are not only undermining programs and services that Canadians need, but that these cuts are in fact the wrong medicine for our weak and struggling economy. They are undermining our employment. They are cutting thousands of jobs out of the Canadian economy. They are creating slack in our GDP and slowing our growth.

There is no stimulus in the budget to increase our exports or to spark private sector investment. In fact, budget 2013 is hinged on a wing and a prayer that consumers will somehow increase their debt even more to drag the economy along into growth, which is not what we need because Canadians are already more indebted than ever in our history.

Nevertheless, the economy is growing, although somewhat sluggishly. What the PBO also shows is that the government, just through growth in our economy, will get the books back to balance by 2015-16 without the austerity measures from these cuts.

The question we must ask is why would the government undermine programs and services Canadians need if it is unnecessary.

We are proposing in Bill C-476 that the Parliamentary Budget Officer be a separate and independent officer of Parliament, a position that can maintain its jurisdiction and not serve at the whim of the government and not be subservient to the Library of Parliament.

We believe that this position ought to be fully independent, like other similar positions, such as the Senate Ethics Officer, the Auditor General and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. These are positions that are established by an act of law that guarantees the independence and the resources to these positions so that they can fully carry out their work without the interference of any government, no matter which government is in power.

That is true democratic accountability. When we are talking about the finances of the country, surely there is no more important work that a government does and has the trust of Canadians to do, which is collecting their tax dollar, overseeing it wisely and spending it well.

I encourage all members of this House to support this important bill and make this a reality.

• (1150)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all heard just moments ago, I think I touched a nerve with the leader of the official opposition, the member of Parliament for Outremont, when I suggested that this private member's bill did not have a cost to it. When I suggested that the NDP, in fact, also has a history and a record of doing these kinds of things without any regard to cost to Canadians, the official opposition leader suggested that I was not being honest about their propositions for budget 2013. The leader of the official opposition is either embarrassed by the launch the NDP did for budget 2013, or he has selective memory, for whatever reason. We would leave it to him to explain that.

However, let me read from the transcript of the official launch of the party's, that is the NDP's, new campaign around budget 2013

held at the National Press Theatre, March 18, 2013. Here is a question from a journalist:

I'm just wondering if you could kind of, you know, focus on specifics in terms of the price tag. How much does the NDP want to spend on the various aspects...? Can you kind of provide some more fiscal details in terms of how much money you'd spend?

The member who just spoke, who is the finance critic for the NDP, the member for Parkdale—High Park, responded to that question from the journalist at the news conference, saying:

I'm not going to pull out one piece and say here's the price tag because I think it's a shift in approach.

Then the question from the journalist was as follows:

But in this campaign, has the NDP... does it lay out how much an NDP government would spend on the investments in the infrastructure or on pensions or on the small businesses?

Of course, the finance critic for the NDP said:

No, as we get closer to an election, we usually cost these things out specifically... We're making recommendations to the government for their budget on Thursday.

Again, it speaks to the misleading comments made by the NDP opposition leader. He obviously has something to hide, because he does not cost his own private member's bill, again, because it is going to cost substantial money not only for Canadians but for a number of other organizations that bear the brunt of decisions made by government.

[*Translation*]

I appreciate this opportunity to express our concerns regarding Bill C-476, an act that would make the Parliamentary Budget Officer an officer of Parliament.

As everyone knows, accountability and transparency in Canada's public and democratic institutions are characteristic of this government. It was our government that promised to scrutinize public expenditures more closely. The first thing we did was implement one of the most comprehensive and complex pieces of legislation on accountability ever passed in this country.

[*English*]

Through the Federal Accountability Act and the accompanying action plan, we brought in a series of accountability reforms. Among these reforms were the designation of deputy ministers and deputy heads as accounting officers, the five-year review of the relevance and effectiveness of departmental grant and contribution programs, the new mandate for the Auditor General to follow the money to grant and contribution recipients, the law requiring departments to send results of public opinion research to Library and Archives Canada within six months, and the removal of the entitlement of political staff to priority appointments in the public service.

These reforms were followed up with others. They included new electoral finance rules and restrictions on gifts to political candidates; the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act; the new Conflict of Interest Act; tougher penalties and sanctions for people who commit fraud involving taxpayers' money; the clarification and simplification of the rules governing grants and contributions; the extension of the Access to Information Act to cover agents of Parliament, five foundations and the Canadian Wheat Board; and of course, a strengthened Lobbying Act to ensure that lobbying is done fairly and openly.

In all, our Federal Accountability Act and action plan made substantive changes to 45 federal statutes and amended over 100 others, touching virtually every part of government.

[Translation]

Furthermore, we took steps to ensure that Parliament and Canadians are better informed about public spending. Among other things, this meant improving financial reporting. For instance, since April 2011, the government has been preparing quarterly financial reports on spending for departments, agencies and crown corporations. In that regard, we have adopted a private sector practice, whereby publicly traded companies have been required to publish quarterly financial reports for years.

• (1155)

[English]

This is but one example of the government's leadership in supporting the work of parliamentarians, and there are many others. I would add that our leadership in supporting the work of Parliament is evident in the fact that the Public Accounts of Canada, one of the most important accountability documents prepared by the government, has consistently received a clean opinion by the Auditor General of Canada. As the record shows, our government is as committed as ever to providing more timely and relevant information on its many and varied activities to parliamentarians and Canadians.

[Translation]

Creating the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is another way we strengthened Parliament's authority to closely examine how taxpayers' money is spent. Our government established this office in 2006 in order for it to provide Parliament with independent analyses and research on economic and budget issues and thus to increase Parliament's ability to hold the government to account.

As we know, the first Parliamentary Budget Officer did just that. Under the Library of Parliament, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has the mandate, resources and the necessary independence from the government to do his job.

[English]

However, with Bill C-476, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act, the hon. member opposite wants to change all of this. The bill would separate the Parliamentary Budget Officer from the Library of Parliament and make the Parliamentary Budget Officer an officer of Parliament with his or her own department.

The changes proposed in the bill would have several serious impacts. The role of the PBO would change significantly, becoming less responsive to the research and analytical needs of parliamentar-

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ians while at the same time creating confusion about the respective roles of the PBO and the Auditor General. We could expect to see some duplication of functions between the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Library of Parliament. We would very likely see an increase in cost associated with the office.

If the bill is passed, the office would become a separate department in its own right, with its own staffing and administrative support requirements. This means that more of the PBO's funding would be diverted to bureaucracy, particularly for services such as corporate administrative support for information technology, which is currently shared with the Library of Parliament, rather than to providing services to parliamentarians.

[Translation]

We support a non-partisan and independent Parliamentary Budget Officer. Our commitment to this office is stronger than ever. Furthermore, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, as we know it today, is a responsible and affordable component of our accountability and transparency framework.

[English]

It has the mandate. It has the resources and the independence needed to perform its role and to hold the government to account. It is doing its job of providing independent fiscal and economic analysis, and it is serving parliamentarians and Canadians very well. We will continue to ensure that it has the independence necessary to do so. That is why we will not support the bill.

In closing, having witnessed the personal attack by the leader of the official opposition just moments ago, I must say that these accusations and allegations he throws out are, frankly, not true. They are misleading, and in my opinion, will actually damage his reputation as someone who wants to become prime minister of Canada. When he accuses other members across the way of untrue situations, he ought to look at himself in the mirror. He was, in fact, a Liberal cabinet minister. He is now leader of the federal NDP. I would ask him to perhaps take into consideration his own record, which is lengthy, of flip-flops over decades of political experience. I on this side will continue to do my job with the utmost truthfulness and dedication to my constituents.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today to Bill C-476 introduced by the Leader of the Opposition. This bill would make the Parliamentary Budget Officer an officer of Parliament separate from and independent of the government, just like the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

Government Orders

The first Parliamentary Budget Officer took office in 2008. His mandate is to provide Parliament with independent analysis of the state of the nation's finances, the government estimates and trends in the national economy and, at the request of any parliamentary committee or parliamentarian, to estimate the cost of any proposal that relates to a matter over which Parliament has jurisdiction.

In fact, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is replete with economists, tax experts, accountants and other experts in public accounting and economic forecasting. Their mandate is to provide neutral and professional advice to parliamentarians who can thus properly analyze the government's expenditures. *The Globe and Mail* hit the nail on the head when it described the usefulness of the Parliamentary Budget Officer in the following terms:

With better information to scrutinize the financial decisions of the government the PBO enhances the ability of Parliamentarians to hold the government to account. Moreover, the PBO provides a source of credible cost estimates for new initiatives proposed by Parliamentarians, allowing them to contribute more to policy debates. The government has the vast and deep resources of the Ministry of Finance for these tasks; the PBO helps Parliament keep pace.

Since this position was created, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has done extraordinary work and has called into question the Conservatives' budget projections, in spite of the fact that he was not given all the tools he needed to do his job properly.

Let us not forget that during the 2008 election campaign, at the height of the war in Afghanistan, the government refused to provide the real cost of the military mission and the Parliamentary Budget Officer revealed that the cost of this war was much higher than we had thought. Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, determined that the war in Afghanistan was going to cost Canadians \$18 billion. This clearly shows how important the Parliamentary Budget Officer is to the strength of our democracy. Without the information provided by Kevin Page on the cost of the war in Afghanistan, voters would have had to vote for a government without knowing all the facts about a fundamental public policy.

Let us also remember that Kevin Page released a very important report in March 2011, in which he concluded that the Conservative government was deliberately underestimating the cost of the F-35 fighter jets. While the Minister of National Defence claimed that the 65 F-35s would cost only \$14.7 billion, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that the bill would come to over \$29 billion. That important report forced the Conservative government to go back to the drawing board.

We could also mention the report that Kevin Page released in February 2012 on old age security. While the Conservatives claimed that they had to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 to deal with the retirement of the baby boomers, the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that the federal government had exaggerated the expected financial crisis and that the old age security program was actually completely sustainable.

The Conservatives were very upset about these three reports on Afghanistan, the F-35s and the sustainability of the old age security program. They even went after the former Parliamentary Budget Officer because he repeatedly pointed out their poor fiscal management.

I hope that I have shown just how important it is to have an independent Parliamentary Budget Officer who can force the government to be accountable to MPs and the Canadians it represents.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for private members' business has expired. The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles will have five minutes remaining when this matter returns before the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1205)

[English]

STRENGTHENING MILITARY JUSTICE IN THE DEFENCE OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed from March 21 consideration of Bill C-15, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to address Bill C-15. I have had the opportunity to provide comments on Bill C-15 at earlier stages and I would like to think I spoke a great deal on the importance of the issue. I have a bit of a bias, I must say right upfront, in the sense that I had the privilege and honour of serving in the Canadian Forces for a few years back in the 1980s. I have a great amount of respect for what the men and women do in Canada and abroad and the important role they play in who we are as a society and in protecting our interests, again whether here or abroad.

It is important to recognize that there are two different systems of justice: the Canadian civilian justice system and the military justice system. As much as possible, it is important that we recognize the differences and, where we can, we need to narrow the gap in the disparities between the military and civilian justice systems. We need to recognize the importance, for example, of the Charter of Rights. I hope to highlight that fact.

We could argue that this or that should happen, but what I do know is this has been an issue for a number of years already and we have seen the government in the past few years attempt to rectify the problem. Unfortunately, many questions have gone unanswered. If we were to confer with different stakeholders, we would find that there was a bit of optimism at the committee stage and the government could have listened a little more to what some of the concerns were. I do not think the government acted in areas it could have or should have acted, which ultimately would have provided a healthier bill today.

I have had the opportunity to read over some of the comments made at the committee stage and there was one in particular by Justice Létourneau. He said it in a wonderful way when he made reference to soldiers. He stated that they were, in fact, citizens of Canada and should enjoy the same constitutional and charter rights that all citizens had. I will quote specifically what he had to say in committee, which is as follows:

Government Orders

We as a society have forgotten, with harsh consequences for the members of the armed forces, that a soldier is before all a Canadian citizen, a Canadian citizen in uniform. So is a police officer...he's not deprived of his right to a jury trial. Is that what we mean by "equality of all before the law"? Is not the soldier who risks his life for us entitled to at least the same rights and equality before the law as his fellow citizens when he is facing criminal prosecutions?

He went on to answer the question by stating "yes".

That is what I mean about the disparities between the military and civil justice systems and the need for us to narrow the process so we can ensure, as much as possible, the rights that are so very important to all Canadians. I highlight the importance of something which we in the Liberal Party are very passionate about; that being our Constitution and Charter of Rights.

● (1210)

In committee Mr. Drapeau, a retired colonel, also gave some fairly striking testimony that I thought would be appropriate for all members to at least take note of. In reference to this whole military justice regime, he stated that an accused:

—before a summary trial has no right to appeal either the verdict or the sentence. This is despite the fact that the verdict and sentence are imposed without any regard to the minimum standards of procedural rights in criminal proceedings, such as the right to counsel, the presence of rules of evidence, and the right to appeal.

In Canada, these rights do not exist in a summary trial, not even for a decorated veteran, yet a Canadian charged with a summary conviction offence in a civilian court, such as Senator Brazeau, enjoys all these rights, as does someone appearing in small claims court or even in traffic court.

He went on to say:

I find it very odd that those who put their lives at risk to protect the rights of Canadians are themselves deprived of some of these charter rights when facing a quasi-criminal [law] process with the possibility of loss of liberty through detention in a military barracks.

Those two paragraphs summarize the concerns the government was unable to or failed to address at the committee stage. We find that most unfortunate.

We recognize there are numerous changes being suggested in the legislation with respect to, in part, the 10-year clause for military judges; outlining sentence objectives and principles; amending the composition of the court martial panel selection, which would be based on the rank of the accused; changing the name from the Canadian Forces Grievance Board to the military grievance external review committee, which gives the impression it is more at arm's-length, at least in name; and imposing a criminal record for certain service offences. There are more aspects being dealt with in Bill C-15, but those are just some of the ones I would highlight. I recognize I am limited in how long I can speak to this issue.

However, if we deal with the idea of imposing a criminal record, which stays with the individual after he or she has left the forces and can have a very profound impact on the opportunities that he or she would have after serving our country, we must be careful in what we are putting on our men and women of the forces who find themselves in awkward positions at times while serving. There are different types of crimes that take place.

Having been a previous member of the forces, I recognize the importance of compliance and obeying superior officers and so forth.

We understand there is a huge difference if someone is working at company X in Toronto versus that same person working in the Canadian Forces and he or she shows up late. If a member of the Canadian Forces is late, there is a significant penalty. If he or she decides to disappear for a few days, or go AWOL as it is referred to, there is a fairly significant consequence to that action compared to in civilian life depending on the job.

We recognize there is a need to have discipline within the military, but we also recognize that it is important for all of us to understand that a Canadian soldier is a Canadian citizen first and foremost. We have laws today, whether by charter or otherwise, but we want to ensure that members of our forces are treated, as much as possible, in the same fashion as civilians would be treated. This legislation was an attempt at narrowing the differences between civilian law and military law. Had the government worked a little more with the stakeholders, we would probably have better legislation than what we have now.

● (1215)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has noted that the changes to the military justice system to update it and modernize it have been a long time coming. However, his speech makes it clear that he has not been following the debate in all of its breadth and depth over recent months. Could he confirm to the House that he understands that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms actually explicitly recognizes a place and the constitutionality of an independent military justice system?

Could the member also confirm to the House that the changes foreseen in Bill C-15, which would ensure that continuing constitutionality and would ensure, for example, that a wide range of offences would no longer generate criminal records, are urgently needed and that the only thing standing between those changes, which the members supports, and their enactment is this debate? Is it not now urgent to move on from report stage to adoption of the bill so our men and women in uniform can benefit from the improvements to the military justice system foreseen in Bill C-15?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member does not reflect on many of the comments that were made in committee, dealing with issues such as summary trials and pardons. This is something the Conservatives got rid of.

I use the example of the charter because it is something to which people look. I am not necessarily saying that Bill C-15 would contradict the charter. That is not the purpose of me raising it. It is just that there is this expectation Canadians have, whether it is issues like the charter or other criminal laws, that members of our forces are treated as Canadian citizens.

I recognize the difference between our civil court system and our military justice system and there is a need to have some difference. However, I do not necessarily believe the government has done what it could have done to narrow the scope and get the different stakeholders on the same page.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments shared by my colleague from Winnipeg North, who has distinguished himself with military service in our country.

Government Orders

His reference to the testimony that was cited through the committee hearings is important because the witnesses who gave testimony brought a great deal of credibility to the issue. In particular, I refer to comments by retired Colonel Michel Drapeau, who had identified the fact that without a pardon system, which was recently revoked by the Conservatives, and the summary trial being set up as it was, with no record and no means of meaningful appeal, Canadian Forces members were left haunted by a record and unable to find employment upon release.

In his experience, would he see the same? It is tough getting work after someone finishes a career, I do not see that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

• (1220)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, when we have a retired colonel come before the committee and address it with those types of issues, it is very important, in particular for those Conservative backbenchers, to really tune in and listen to what has been said. For someone leaving the forces after serving, not all of these incidents that occurred in the forces deserve to have a criminal record upon exiting the forces. However, the impact that this will have on individuals in their ability to get the type of job that would be of great benefit for them and their families, has been somewhat restricted. That was why the pardon system was there. There was a great deal of merit in it. It was one of the issues brought up time and time again as one of the inequities that the government did not really give any—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Halifax West.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in debate on Bill C-15 today, a bill that involves the military justice system.

We in the Liberal Party recognize the need to reform the law in this regard and to reform the Canadian court martial system. It is very important to ensure it remains effective, fair and transparent and to look for ways that it might be improved. However, we do not accept the idea that a Canadian citizen who joins the Armed Forces ought to thereby lose the basic rights of a Canadian citizen, especially before military courts.

Like almost all Canadians, the Liberal Party believes that human rights and equality are universal issues. They are universally important, and that is why, back in 1982, the Trudeau government, along with the provinces, changed the Constitution, repatriated the Constitution of Canada from Britain and brought in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Those rights are extremely important.

It is a shame that last year, on the 30th anniversary of the charter, the government did not feel very much inclined to celebrate, whereas the vast majority of Canadians hold the Charter of Rights and Freedoms very near and dear to their hearts and believe it is very important. We could ask for the views of anyone from former Eastern bloc countries, for example, or anybody else who has emigrated from a country where the kinds of rights found in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are not respected.

In this case we are talking about the summary trial system within the military. It is important for it to be a good and properly balanced system and for it to respect the rights of Canadian citizens who take on the task and show the courage to make the fundamental offer to put their lives on the line for our country. It is important that we treat their decision with respect and appreciation and ensure that their rights are protected.

Our concern, though, is that within the summary trial system, not having an effective means for appeal and not having recorded proceedings are important shortcomings that ought to be remedied.

I cannot imagine people not being allowed to have an appeal in the civil or criminal court system in Canada, or that even if they were allowed to appeal, the lawyers on the appeal would not have access to the written record from the trial court.

How could we possibly put forward appeal arguments without referring to what was found or what the evidence was before the trial court? That makes no sense to me. It is fundamentally important that an individual have a record of the evidence, because otherwise appeal judges cannot make the kind of judgment they have to make about the evidence and about whether, for instance, the evidence actually supported the findings of the court in a particular case.

We do not believe, in some cases, that introducing a criminal record for Armed Forces members for certain offences is just and fair. Some of those offences would not be considered criminal offences outside the military, so we should consider very carefully whether we want to give people who have offered to serve their country a criminal record for some offences that would not be considered serious enough outside the military to justify a criminal record, especially considering that the means for pardoning offences in this country has effectively been removed by the Conservative government. It has made it much more difficult, it has made it take much longer and it has made it much more expensive for anyone who has a record to get a pardon, regardless of the merits of their cases.

That is very unfortunate, because surely my hon. friends across the way would agree that there are cases in which people convicted of a criminal offence have redeemed themselves, have done wonderful work after that, and have shown themselves to be model citizens who are deserving of a pardon. How do we do that when we are removing that opportunity from people who have served their country in the Armed Forces?

• (1225)

We also find it problematic that the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff can intervene and give direction in a particular, specific police investigation by military police.

Again, if we look at the system in Canada outside of the military, we would never dream of saying that the Prime Minister should be able to stop an investigation by the RCMP if he does not like it, nor would we say that he should be able to give the RCMP directions on how to conduct an investigation. Surely nobody on either side of the House would suggest, I hope, that we ought to do that or that we ought to give that kind of power to the Prime Minister.

Government Orders

In specific investigations it is obviously important that we have a separation between the elected powers in the executive branch and the people who actually run the investigations and run the police. It is vitally important and it even extends, in our country, to the legal actions taken by the Government of Canada.

For instance, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada is involved very little in legal proceedings involving the Government of Canada. He or she may be called upon from time to time to give policy direction in relation to something the department is doing or in relation to a matter, but not to get involved in the actual prosecution of a case or in determining what the government's position would be or in how it should be argued before the courts.

This is for obvious reasons. It is not the role of an elected official of the executive branch to do that. Maybe at times we may have someone in the role of the minister of justice who has expertise in an area, but it is still not appropriate, and generally speaking, that person would not have particular legal expertise in the area that is being adjudicated before the courts. It is very important to have that separation.

In this case, there is the idea that the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff could step in and call the Provost Marshal and say, "Stop this investigation. We do not like it politically. It is not popular with the government. Cut it out." I am not suggesting that the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff would do that; I have great confidence in the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff at the moment, and I trust we will have good ones in the future, but we have got to have that separation. It is a fundamental issue of justice.

There are a number of disparities and differences between the military and civil justice systems that we think should be narrowed as much as possible. Yes, where it is essential, we are going to have differences, and that is fine; however, where it is not essential, let us remove those differences.

While we recognize that updates to the military criminal justice system must be made, we think the government is missing a real opportunity to make those changes properly and in a way that respects the rights of Canadian citizens who have made the choice to serve their country and put their lives on the line by joining the Canadian Armed Forces.

It is inexplicable that many aspects of the military justice system remain unimproved or provide powers that we feel are unnecessary. For example, Bill C-15 enshrines in law a list of military offences that now carry a criminal record, some of which we think are hardly necessary. We no longer have the pardon system—as I was saying earlier, the government has basically revoked it—and summary trials are set up in the military with no record and no means of meaningful appeal. How could one appeal without a record of evidence? We think it leaves the possibility of Canadian Forces members being haunted by a criminal record and being unable to find employment upon release. Is that really what Canadians want if someone is convicted in the military of a very minor offence that would not be an offence under the criminal law of the outside world?

I think Canadians have a great appreciation for the military. We should oppose and defeat this bill.

● (1230)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again we have a speech from the Liberal Party in which it is not clear what proposals and specific changes to the bill the Liberals would be looking for at this stage, after literally 10 years of consideration of many of these proposals, after exhaustive consideration in committee, where the Liberal Party is still represented, and after exhaustive consideration in this House.

My question for the hon. member is this: why continue this debate, which is in fact delaying the day on which Canadian Forces members who now face a criminal record for minor offences might no longer carry that criminal record into civilian life? Why is the hon. member delaying that?

Second, why is the hon. member challenging the whole summary trial system? It is a cornerstone of the military justice system, and its constitutionality has been accepted, even with the different rules of evidence and the lack of appeal to which he has referred. Is he proposing at this late stage to demolish the whole military justice system?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for the question, but I have the feeling that he did not listen to my speech.

For instance, I talked about the fact that there ought to be a record kept. People ought to have access to a record of the trial in which they are convicted. That is one obvious change. As well, there ought to be an appeal.

Those are two pretty basic things. To suggest that I was not calling for any particular changes and did not put any forward for consideration and discussion by this House does not make any sense. I thought he was listening to what I had to say, but apparently I was mistaken.

I do not think he was listening either to the previous speaker, my hon. colleague for Winnipeg North, who quoted some of the judges and other experts who have expressed grave concern about provisions in the bill and the ways in which they do not comply with fundamental justice.

I hope my hon. colleague will listen to other speeches from members on this side of the House, because I think he would benefit from doing so.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely worried about the proposal that the government has on the books, and my colleague mentioned his concerns as well. There is this whole problem of the balance of justice, and I wonder whether the proposal for the military justice system whereby people may be denied their rights in terms of fairness under the law is actually creeping into our civil justice system.

We heard the announcement on the weekend that if a member of Parliament wants to talk to a commanding officer in the RCMP, the minister's office will have to be notified. This goes against everything in terms of the separation between the political process and policing in this country. It is just pure wrong.

Government Orders

I ask my colleague whether we are seeing that creeping in from the military system. Is everything going to be politically influenced, whether it is in the civil justice system or the military justice system?

● (1235)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. colleague for Malpeque. Of course, he has some experience in relation not only to the RCMP but also in relation to the justice system. As a former Solicitor General of Canada, he dealt with issues like this.

However, I can assure members that he would not have been interfering and trying to tell the RCMP how to conduct an investigation, which is the kind of thing we are talking about here in relation to the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, who, under these rules, would be able to call a halt to a session like that. Like my hon. colleague, I am concerned about this idea.

We know that members of Parliament cannot talk directly to members of the RCMP to seek information on what is happening in their area and get information that they need to do their jobs. We know how little the Conservative government enjoys the idea of allowing members of Parliament to have access to information about what is happening in government. We know the problems that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has had in extracting budgetary information from the government, to the point that just the other day the Prime Minister had the gall to suggest that the PBO was being partisan by asking for information on behalf of members of Parliament generally. That is outrageous and inappropriate.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to get up and to follow my colleague today in raising some of the concerns we have with Bill C-15.

It seems the longer we are here in the House, the more we see a variety of things happening. My colleague from Malpeque mentioned that now, in order to speak to members of the RCMP, MPs must have permission from the minister. I have had many conversations with the RCMP on the issue of sexual assault and harassment in the RCMP in the last year or so. That announcement just helps to bring forward more of these issues about a balance of justice and fairness in the system for everybody, whether they are in the military or a private citizen. We all need to be very much concerned when the politics get too far into the issues of policing or justice. Hence, the reason that I am on my feet and commenting on Bill C-15, which is an act to amend the National Defence Act.

I will read a bit of the information, so that we and anybody who is watching will know why we are raising some issues on something that we are not 100% against and at one point we may have even supported. It will put this in the context of so many other things that seem to be heading in a direction where we are going to politicize the police force the same way that everything that the Government of Canada puts its hands on is politicized. We need to flag these issues, so that we all are thinking them through very carefully. Therefore, I offer a bit of a summary on Bill C-15 and what it is about.

Bill C-15 would “(a) provide for security of tenure for military judges until [they reach the age of 60];...”, which is the retirement age for military judges, contrary to all other Canadian citizens who would have to wait until they are 67 to get their pensions. They could be removed for cause on the recommendations of an inquiry

committee, or through resignation. It would also “(b) [allow for] the appointment of part-time military judges;” and outlining sentencing “...objectives and principles;”.... The bill would “(d) provide for [new] sentencing options, including absolute discharges, intermittent sentences and restitution [orders];...”.

As my colleague across the hall mentioned, there are some things in here that are supportable. Unfortunately, the question is whether there would be a true balance of justice in all aspects of it. Like many things that are introduced into this House, it does not necessarily qualify on many avenues. There are some parts of it that would be good, but there are always so many other parts in legislation brought forward by the government that are not good. We do not just adapt something because, while it has three good parts in it, the rest of it is no good. Because of that we have to support it? No. If it is not good in the overall 10 points that need to be examined, then we should not be supporting it.

Bill C-15 would look “...at amending composition of a court martial panel [selections] according to the rank of the accused...”, and it would change “...the name of the Canadian Forces Grievance Board to the Military Grievances External Review Committee”.

That raises another issue. In the RCMP or the military, when the members have a serious grievance, where do they go? In the RCMP, from what we have heard in the sexual harassment hearings, they have to go to their own supervisors. Many times that is the person causing the problem. Or they go to another person above that person, but it is always within the same confines of that same family. For the RCMP in particular, there needs to be an external review board that is 100 yards away from anything to do with the RCMP, that is truly independent and can hear a grievance from anyone who is working for the RCMP. Similarly for the military, there needs to be an arm's-length grievance committee, or a place where members can go and truly get a hearing on their issue. Complaining to their supervisor's friend who is going to keep everything within the same confines, and is not going to want to see anybody pay too big a price for a grievance, really jeopardizes justice in this country. Certainly, from what I have heard from the hearings, there is a need for a union to represent many of the officers.

● (1240)

If they want to do things right, then there has to be an arm's-length committee, as many of the police services across Canada have. It is an external body, where people can go with a serious complaint and get a true hearing. It is not just “passing the buck” from one to another; then people end up not getting true justice. One of the things that we hear a lot about in the Liberal Party, as I think all elected members of Parliament do, is justice. Justice does not only need to be done, it needs to be seen to be done. The perception out there is that is not way it is necessarily happening.

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As Liberals, we understand the need to reform the Canadian court martial system to ensure that it remains effective, fair and transparent. Canada has been the leader in so many areas when it comes to human rights, when it comes to the charter, and when it comes to issues of fairness, of ensuring that what we do in Canada is balanced and fair and respectful of everybody's rights. More and more we are having to question whether that is exactly what is happening or not. We believe, as Canadian citizens and as Liberals, that people who decide to join the Canadian Forces should not thereby lose part of their rights before the courts.

Again, we are back into that system. We want to attract more and more young people to a career in the military. We see the men and women who are out there fighting for us and representing us, and we are grateful that they have the courage and the commitment to do this. We want to make sure that they are treated fairly.

Bill C-15 does not answer all those questions. It leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Before we pass Bill C-15, we should make sure we have perfected the bill so that those in the military are not losing their opportunities for a fair and just trial.

The Liberal Party also understands that rights and equality are universal. We talk a lot about that. That really means that it is for everybody. It does not matter who a person is, where they come from or what job they are doing, we would like to think that everybody in Canada is treated fairly and equitably. Without an effective means for an appeal and no recorded proceedings, the current summary trial system is unbalanced and does not represent the basic rights of a Canadian Forces member.

We also do not believe that introducing a criminal record for Canadian Forces members for certain offences is fair and just as a means for pardoning offences, which has recently been removed by the Conservatives. Again, we go back to trying to be fair and balanced, and treating people with respect, making sure that everybody has their role and that they do not violate that.

We also find it problematic that the VCDS can intervene and give direction in military police investigations. The VCDS is also subject to the code of service discipline.

Bill C-15 is in keeping with a lot of Bill C-42 and a lot of other things that continually try to give other people more power rather than making sure that we really have an equitable system that is going to be there to represent everyone, that we are not going to discourage people from joining the service, that we are not going to have people join the military and then leave, speaking very negatively about their experience.

Shifting the power around to different people rather than having an independent body do the review makes us question where we are going with this issue. I met yesterday with a group of people from Venezuela who were upset about the recent election. They were talking about how the government of the day controls everything. These things keep being raised.

I am really concerned that little by little we are losing the things that we value the most here in our own country, that there is an eroding of the power of parliamentarians, and that a real miscarriage of justice is happening.

● (1245)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague speak, and she is talking about fairness and justice for all. Our government is very intent on seeing those things happen and making sure that there is fairness in the process.

If my colleague sees these things as not being fair, then they were unfair under her government as well. She was there for 13 years. Why did her government not fix it—

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thirteen long productive years.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thirteen long forgotten years, the member is absolutely right.

Why did the Liberals not put fairness into the process to ensure that these people were treated equitably? Why did the member allow it to go on for so long?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thirteen long years, Mr. Speaker, and I am looking forward to being back in government for another 13 years. We will make sure that we have a lot of time to undo all of the miscarriages that the Conservatives have produced.

I want to go back to the minister's comments on Friday about my colleagues and I continuing to work on issues like the RCMP and justice in general. I really and truly am very worried about the road that we are heading on where there will be no justice any longer. We are going to end up like those very countries that we are so critical of when it comes to people being able to speak out. The government has been muzzling RCMP officers and its own members, but it is not going to muzzle any of us.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put two ideas to my colleague for her response.

First, why would Colonel Michel Drapeau, perhaps Canada's most experienced military lawyer, a long serving member of the Canadian Forces and now a veteran, be opposing this legislation as aggressively as he is?

Second, if we look at other countries, which is a good thing to do when new legislation is being brought in particularly in an area as sensitive as this, we understand that the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, France, Belgium, Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania and Netherlands, to name a few, have improved their very legislation in this area by adopting the kinds of ideas we have been putting forward as an opposition party. Why would the government not want to do that to be in concert with so many other nations?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the shortcomings of the current government. The Conservative government is focused on our own boundaries, as if we live in a world by ourselves.

Canada has brought forward model legislation in many areas. We learn from things that happen in other countries. I want to quote Justice Létourneau who said so eloquently:

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We as a society have forgotten, with harsh consequences for the members of the armed forces, that a soldier is before all a Canadian citizen, a Canadian citizen in uniform. So is a police officer; he is a Canadian citizen in uniform, but he's not deprived of his right to a jury trial. Is that what we mean by "equality of all before the law"? Is not the soldier who risks his life for us entitled to at least the same rights and equality before the law as his fellow citizens when he is facing criminal prosecutions?

Justice Létourneau and the others are clearly very experienced people. Colonel Drapeau indicated similar concerns. It means we should take a step back and see how we can improve this legislation so it would achieve for all what is necessary as true Canadians and encourage people to join the military and continue with a great career.

• (1250)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to join my colleagues who have spoken so eloquently for equality for those individuals in the military who serve Canadians. This particular legislation purports to update our military criminal justice system, but in fact has some significant gaps.

It is always good to review our laws to make sure that they reflect present realities and that they are equitable, appropriate and consistent with our Constitution. The military criminal justice system is no exception. This legislation has been worked on for a long time but the Liberal Party of Canada believes it is not where it needs to be in order to get our support. The members for Winnipeg North, Halifax West and York West made that case in quite a specific and compelling way. We are being asked to support something that still has so many flaws; that is politics.

[Translation]

Clearly, many aspects of the military justice system remain inexplicably unchanged or give unnecessary powers in this bill. For instance, the bill enshrines in law a list of military offences that will carry a criminal record in the future, which is not necessary in many cases.

Given that the pardon system was recently revoked and that summary trials are what they are—with no record and no means of meaningful appeal—the members of the Armed Forces will find themselves with criminal records and unable to find employment upon release.

[English]

Clearly there are some flaws in the bill. The one I want to focus on in particular is the issue of human rights and equality. It really boils down to what kind of society we want to have in Canada, and I think Canadians are clear. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada is widely supported right across the country and is a very proud part of our framework for protecting rights but also for enshrining responsibilities in our country, to make sure those who are vulnerable have the law on their side to protect their right to equality.

It has been shameful and disappointing that the Conservative Party of Canada has chosen to minimize the importance of this very important part of our Constitution, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, essentially dismissing and not celebrating its great anniversaries. Last year was the 30th anniversary, and there was not much of a murmur from the government, but hundreds of millions of dollars went into celebrating the anniversary of a war.

That goes down to what kind of society we want to have. Do we want to have one that protects rights and freedoms, or do we want to have one that is all about punishment? We see changes to immigration. We see in Bill C-10, that grab bag of bad public policy, that the Conservative government is much more focused on punishment than on equality. That is reflected in this bill as well.

[Translation]

In his testimony before committee, retired Colonel Michel Drapeau noted:

...someone accused before a summary trial has no right to appeal either the verdict or the sentence. This is despite the fact that the verdict and sentence are imposed without any regard to the minimum standards of procedural rights in criminal proceedings, such as the right to counsel, the presence of rules of evidence, and the right to appeal.

In Canada, these rights do not exist in summary trials, not even for a decorated veteran, yet a Canadian charged with a summary conviction offence in civilian court... enjoys all of these rights. So does someone appearing in a small claims court or in a traffic court.

• (1255)

[English]

He goes on to say:

[Translation]

I find it very odd that those who put their lives at risk to protect the rights of Canadians are themselves deprived of some of these charter rights when facing a quasi-criminal process with the possibility of loss of liberty through detention in a military barracks.

[English]

Clear questions of inequality have arisen here. There are problems with the bill that are fundamental to the kind of society we want to have, not just a few tweaks that we could have put into the bill and that the government has not done. This does go down to fundamentally what kind of society we want to have. This kind of inequality is being unfortunately cemented into other bills and other laws brought forward by the Conservative government.

I want to refer to some comments made by my colleague from Mount Royal recently on the occasion of the 31st anniversary of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[Translation]

According to Justice Létourneau, soldiers are citizens and they should enjoy the same constitutional rights guaranteed by the charter as any other citizen.

[English]

This is what he said:

[Translation]

"We as a society have forgotten, with harsh consequences for the members of the armed forces, that a soldier is before all a Canadian citizen, a Canadian citizen in uniform."

[English]

In other words, they should be able to count on all of the rights and protections that citizens enjoy in our country.

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Referring to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the member for Mount Royal raised a question of privilege in the House this past March and expressed concern that the government is failing to live up to its own statutory obligation, which is expressed in section 4.1 of the Department of Justice Act.

In law, this is requiring that the government, that the Minister of Justice, examine each and every government bill introduced in the House to ensure it is consistent with the charter. That would seem like a simple step to respect our fundamental constitutional obligations as parliamentarians and as government in law-making and public policy-making.

How often has the government actually done that? How often has the government checked and done a review to ensure that its bills introduced in the House are consistent with the charter and receive the constitutional seal of approval? How often has the government reported any inconsistencies, or otherwise, to the House?

Does anybody have an answer to that question?

Some hon. members: Never.

• (1300)

Ms. Joyce Murray: That is right. My colleagues are on the ball. No such report has ever been tabled by the Minister of Justice.

This is not just a procedural rule. This is actually fundamental to protecting our rights and freedoms that are engraved in our country's framework for justice.

Why has the government never actually done that kind of review, and what is the consequence of that?

Actually, the consequence is very expensive, because that means the government continually comes forward with bills that are then contested, either at the provincial level or through other organizations. That ties up court time. That ties up resources. For example, there are challenges now to other government bills. I think there is very likely to be a challenge to the bill we are debating today because this government omitted an important part of our equality framework from the bill, disadvantaging our troops, our Canadian Armed Forces, whom we all respect and would want to see treated equally. I think there may well be a challenge to the bill, because it is flawed, and it will then go through the hoops of being contested and found failing.

Let us avoid that. Let us pull the bill back. Let us fix it before it goes forward, on behalf of Canadians, on behalf of rights and equality and on behalf of our Armed Forces.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to begin by saying that many of us on this side of the House, on the government benches, are taken aback by the member's speech and the other speeches we have heard today from the Liberal Party members. While the member for Vancouver Quadra may have prided herself on running a leadership campaign that was pretty far to the left, many of her proposals today are actually more extreme than those proposed by the NDP in committee or at any other stage of this debate.

My question is: If she thinks the summary trial system is unconstitutional, does not cohere with the charter, then why did the Liberal Party not do something about that during the 15 years it was

in government under the charter and with this military justice system?

Second, why were these points not raised in committee by the Liberal Party? Why are we suddenly, at report stage, hearing these radical musings from Liberal members about our military justice system, which never came up in committee?

Also, why are they relying on only two witnesses—two witnesses who took extreme positions?

Why are they delaying necessary changes, modernization updating in the military justice?

Finally, why do they not take pride in a military justice system that, as part of our larger justice system, is the envy of the world?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I find it amusing, actually, that the member opposite is using words like “radical” and “extreme” for a proposition the Liberals are making that in fact was applied by the British Parliament, and we have a Conservative government in Britain. The British government did actually go a long way to ensuring the fair treatment of soldiers facing summary trials. In Britain, I would claim that the requirements of independence, impartiality, fairness and equality are very similar to those in Canada.

If we are proposing that this law, before becoming law, should incorporate those kinds of changes that have been incorporated in Britain and so many other places, I fail to understand how these can be considered radical and extreme proposals.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in reference to the member saying that the Liberal caucus was on the ball. I have to say it is a little late to come to be on the ball. When the bill was at second reading and report stage, only one Liberal member spoke at each of those stages. Furthermore, the Liberal Party never made any recommendations for amendments at committee. Now the member is saying these changes should be incorporated into the legislation before it is adopted. The place to actually make proposals is in committee, which the NDP did. We made recommendations for amendments at committee to make the bill better.

I would like to ask the member why more Liberal members did not speak on previous stages of this bill; why they did not recommend these changes or any changes to the bill at committee; and why they did not support the NDP amendments.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, clearly the NDP member prefers process over principle. This is about principle. Is the member saying that committees are an absolutely ironclad place to do great public policy? Do amendments actually happen in committee these days? Does the member feel that committee is a place that he and his party can get great public policy to happen? I would posit that is not the case. To rest a decision on the process in committee rather than the fundamental principle of human rights and equality is not something with which I agree.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question is related to the comment that was just made by the member from the official opposition. We still have time to amend this legislation. I put forward amendments that would preserve the independence of investigations and prevent senior military officials from interfering in the scope of an investigation. It is exactly the opportunity to pass those amendments today. I would be very grateful if the official opposition and the Liberal Party would change their current position of allowing this bill to pass on division and, instead, support a vote on the amendments to improve Bill C-15.

• (1305)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear the member ask a question of process to support a principle rather than a question of process to undermine a principle, as we heard from the NDP.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to join in the debate. It has been informative. Being neither a lawyer with a legal background or a member of the Canadian Armed Forces with a military background, I have certainly learned quite a bit from the debate here today. It has been worthwhile.

That being said, our caucus is blessed with a great depth of legal knowledge. My colleague, the member for Mount Royal, and my colleague from down the road in Halifax West have addressed many of the rights issues woven throughout this piece of legislation. I am certainly respectful of their opinion on it.

As well, our caucus boasts a number of people who have served our country in military service. The member for Winnipeg North is a former member of the Canadian air force. He was posted in Edmonton for a number of years. Our colleague, the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, is a former naval officer, a colonel, in the Canadian navy. He went on to become involved in the space program and was Canada's first astronaut. He is a man whose opinion is widely respected across the country.

Then, of course, from the red chamber, there is Senator Romeo Dallaire. His vast experience and understanding of all issues military has a great deal of equity in his opinion. When people of that calibre bring forward concerns on a particular piece of legislation, such as Bill C-15, obviously it is worth taking note.

One of the key provisions brought forward today is the provision for security of tenure for military justices until they reach the retirement age of 60, resign or are removed for cause on the recommendation of an inquiry committee. The outlining of sentences, objectives and principles is another provision. The legislation would also amend the composition of a court martial panel according to the rank of the accused. The bill also changes the name of the Canadian Forces Grievance Board to the Military Grievances External Review Committee. One of the other key components is that it allows certain service offences to carry a criminal record.

In our party, we understand the need to reform the Canadian court martial system and to ensure that it remains effective, fair and transparent. However, we also believe that Canadian citizens who make that career decision, that life choice, to join the Canadian Forces should not lose some of their rights before the courts.

We believe and understand that rights and equality are universal. Without an effective means for appeal, and no recorded proceedings, which was mentioned by my colleague from Halifax West, the current summary trial system is unbalanced and does not respect the basic rights of Canadian Forces members. Our party does not believe that introducing a criminal record for Canadian Forces members for certain service offences is fair and just, as the means of pardoning offences has been recently removed by the government.

• (1310)

Finally, we find it problematic that the VCDS can intervene and give direction in military police investigations. The VCDS is also subject to the code of service discipline.

Obviously, there are a number of disparities between the military and civil justice systems that should be narrowed as much as possible. While we recognize that updates to the military justice system must be made, the government is missing an opportunity to make these changes properly.

Many aspects of the MJS inexplicably remain unimproved or provide unnecessary powers. For example, Bill C-15 enshrines in law a list of military offences that will now carry a criminal record, and some are hardly necessary. Without a pardon system, which was recently revoked by the Conservatives, and summary trials set up with no records and no meaningful appeal, a Canadian Forces member would be left haunted by a record and unable to find employment upon release.

I would think it would have twiggged on the government that many Canadians, after they finish their military service, have challenges securing that first job out of the service. Many times, the skills an individual acquires, even the technical skills, do not align with accepted or traditional construction trade skills.

The Helmets to Hardhats program, which works with members who try to seek employment after having left the military, is recognition of that. The Conservatives take a great deal of credit for it, but they have put only \$150,000 into the program. The program is really run by Canadian building trades and a number of corporate sponsors. That being said, it is a program that recognizes some of the challenges members of the Canadian Forces face upon release. It would be nice if the government would play a more significant role.

That being said, if the Conservatives were attuned to the challenges of departing members, one would think they would understand that coming out of the military with a criminal record because of an offence that in our own court system would not be recognized as a criminal act becomes a burden in itself. That is yet another challenge that has to be overcome by an individual. It is truly unfortunate and unnecessary.

My colleague from Ajax—Pickering said that the testimony given by a couple of witnesses was somewhat extreme. Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau is a respected Canadian with a very distinguished military career. I will read into the record his quote from the testimony presented:

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I find it very odd that those who put their lives at risk to protect the rights of Canadians are themselves deprived of some of these charter rights when facing a quasi-criminal process with the possibility of loss of liberty through detention in military barracks.

We cannot dismiss testimony from individuals whose opinions we greatly respect. We should take that into consideration. Certainly the testimony of both Retired Colonel Drapeau and M. Létourneau was very compelling and should be reflected going forward.

• (1315)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to clarify, the Liberal Party in the past, like us, has accepted the authority of former senior members of the judiciary, such as Justice Dickson, Justice Lamer and Justice LeSage, who have served at the highest levels with either the Supreme Court of Canada or the Superior Court of Justice in Ontario. None of them have recommended that the summary trial system be dispensed with. None of them have said that it is unconstitutional or contrary to or at odds with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We now have the Liberal Party suddenly claiming support for the charter while ignoring the advice of these eminent jurists, who are great champions of the charter itself. It seems to me that the Liberal Party on this issue, as on so many, no longer has a position.

We just heard the member for Cape Breton—Canso say that Bill C-15 would strengthen the role of the grievance board. It would give it more independence and give it a new name. The member for Vancouver Quadra said that there was no such change in the bill.

It is clear that the Liberals are improvising. They are making up these changes that were never spoken about in committee. Why is that? Why delay the modernization of our military justice system and disregard the sage advice of eminent—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his opinion.

As we know, in every piece of legislation, a number of items will be impacted and a number of items will be changed. Our caucus, and I am sure the House, can agree that probably two-thirds of this bill are worthwhile and well founded.

As a matter of fact, we have seen other aspects of this bill brought before the House in the past. Bill C-7 was here in 2006, and Bill C-41 was in 2008. Both died on the order paper, but many of the components of this bill were brought forward at that time.

There are aspects of this bill we have absolutely no problem with. However, the concerns we have raised through the debate today are real, and I hope that the government is taking note.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals seem to be a little confused this morning, but I will let it slide, since it is Monday morning.

In committee, they had the opportunity to oppose the bill. When they had the chance to move amendments, they did nothing. They also opposed all the amendments proposed by the NDP.

Could the Liberal member name one amendment proposed by the NDP and explain why he is opposed to it?

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I will host a party back at my office if anybody ever gets an amendment passed in committee, because we are being force-fed. I know that the member is a new member, but unlike anything I have seen in my 13 years, the impact of amendments now being brought forward at committee is, for the most part, laughable.

When there is testimony on the record, presented by such respected Canadians, I think it is worthwhile. It is never too late to bring it forward.

My colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands is bringing forward amendments. We will certainly look at those and take them into consideration to see if they can improve the legislation.

• (1320)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an important debate we are having today. This is about the men and women in the Canadian Forces, full stop. It is about whether they will be treated like every other Canadian citizen. It is about whether the government is manifesting what I would describe as stubborn pigheadedness when it comes to improving the military justice system that is in place.

It is impossible for me to speak about this criminal justice bill without being reminded of the typical conduct of the government under the Conservative Party. It is a government that consistently has refused to be bound by its responsibilities under section 4(1) of the Department of Justice Act. For Canadians watching, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, a lawyer, went to the bar when he was sworn in and pledged an oath to uphold the law. When he was sworn in to the role as a lawyer in the province of Ontario, he was sworn in to uphold the law for his entire legal career.

I would argue that since the arrival of the Conservative government, in some quarters described as a regime, it has seen fit to consistently leave aside its responsibilities in this regard. I think the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada may, for example, be in breach of his own code of conduct and his code of ethics as a lawyer. However, that is not what we are debating today.

I am reminded of the words of David Daubney. Mr. Daubney, for my colleagues in the Conservative caucus who do not know, was a member of Parliament with the Progressive Conservative Party. He then went on to a very distinguished career as a lawyer in the Department of Justice, where he served in his last post as director of the criminal law policy unit.

Two day after retiring from his distinguished career, he lashed out at the Conservative government in terms of its conduct with respect to the use of evidence, analysis, research, things that we would rely on as parliamentarians to make the right calls for everyday Canadians, in this case, everyday members in our Canadian Forces.

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Mr. Daubney went on to say that he was extremely disappointed and that was one of the reasons why he left his career. Despite the fact that with his team he delivered hard evidence and good analysis to the government, particularly in areas like mandatory minimums, the government would not hear them. It was more than tone deaf; it simply shut it off.

Here we have another example of a bill. I would like to go back to some words spoken earlier by the MP for Ajax—Pickering, who stood up and boasted that Canada was the envy of the world. He is right. I could not be in more agreement with my colleague, but he knows better. During his time serving as a young ambassador in Afghanistan, he knew that one of the foundational documents we were trying to inculcate into the Afghani system of criminal justice was to use the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as the baseline.

For Canadians who are watching or following, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is now the number one document used in the world for strengthening the rule of law for helping to amend and strengthen constitutions all over the world. When I trained in the former Soviet Union after the wall fell in over 20 countries, I used the Charter of Rights. When I was in the Ukraine last fall, strengthening its legal system, I used the Charter of Rights. Many jurisdictions now look to Canada and look to our charter as the foundational document.

● (1325)

When my colleague for Vancouver Quadra rose to express her concern about the human rights implications in the bill, she was right. I know many members in the Conservative caucus know in their heart of hearts that the bill is incomplete, but it is capable of being, not perfected, but certainly improved, which is why the Liberal Party of Canada is raising these important foundational questions today.

This is about the average man and woman in the Canadian Forces. Should they make a mistake, should they make the wrong choice, as so many Canadian citizens do in their lives from time to time, we want to make absolutely categorically sure that these citizens have the same protections afforded to them as any other citizen living in Canada and walking our streets today possess.

This was why I raised questions this morning around why, for example, the government of the United Kingdom, the British government, had ensured that the requirements for independence and impartiality were woven into its domestic criminal justice system so it was in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. That is a powerful precedent for Canada and for this Parliament, and I think the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada knows that.

In the U.K. context, the British government has ensured that the accused may be represented by counsel and entitled to an appeal under a newly created summary appeal court. It has ensured that the summary appeal court would be presided over by a civilian judge, yet assisted by two military members who were officers or warrant officers to ensure adequate military representation. Also, as a general rule, it has moved to ensure that imprisonment or service detention cannot be imposed where the offender is not legally represented in court or in a court martial. This sounds to me to be an important and

powerful precedent that we should look to weave into our amendments to the criminal justice system.

Comparatively, beyond our common law founding mother ship United Kingdom, why have countries like Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, France, Belgium, Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands and dozens more all moved to ensure that independence, impartiality, fairness and justice are hallmarks of their amendments and improvements to the criminal justice system?

Why only here are we seeing, as I described earlier, the stubborn pigheadedness that seems to find its way into every justice bill the Conservative government brings forward? When in the face of so much evidence, in the face of the opportunity to get it better, why is the government not seizing the opportunity and doing right by Canadian citizens, and more important, doing right by the men and women in our Canadian Forces?

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would note that the world continues to be inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the Canadian Bill of Rights enacted by Mr. Diefenbaker. Those too are anchors of our judicial system, just like the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

However, the real question is this. Why is the Liberal Party changing its position, or is without a position?

On the one hand, the Liberals are saying that the summary trial system is incompatible with the charter. On the other hand, for 15 years, when they governed under the charter, they did nothing to change the situation.

Second, some of the speeches today seem to imply very ambitious amendments, which were either not made by the Liberal Party or not supported by Liberals in committee. Why are they coming at this late date?

Third, when did the Liberal Party stop being inspired by and guided by Canadian legal excellence and start being guided by Lithuania?

Former Chief Justice Lamer, former Chief Justice Dickson, former Chief Justice Lesage have all agreed that the summary trial system, as updated in this bill, would serve Canadian men and women in uniform extremely well. Why does the Liberal Party not think so?

● (1330)

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I will try to take those in order.

First, if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence is now saying that the Liberal Party's amendments would pass in the committee, we should have that discussion. However, given the actual behaviour of the government in the last several years, amendments in committee never see the light of day because, with all due respect to my good colleague from Ajax—Pickering, he has no authority here. All the shots are being called by the Prime Minister's office.

Second, with respect to looking to other judicial traditions, the member is either not a lawyer or is disparaging of the Baltic States, of a 1,000-year-old legal tradition. I am not prepared to disparage Lithuanian legal jurisprudence.

Government Orders

Of course we stand on our own two feet. Of course Canada is a wonderful contributor. However, we look to other jurisdictions because we admit our limitations and we know there are really good valuable lessons to be had in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as to what the Liberal member has said about making amendments in committee, we realize is difficult. We realize the Conservatives have a majority on committee and they are not inclined to make any amendments.

However, we on this side of the House, the NDP, the official opposition, are not willing to sit on our hands. We will make proposals. We will try to make amendments in committee. We will let the Conservatives vote against the amendments. They have the majority.

Why will the Liberal Party not join us in making amendments at the committee?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, our role and our obligation as members of Parliament in the House is to seize every available opportunity to try to make a positive contribution, which is precisely what we are doing today.

It is simply too important to be, in my view, tangled up in procedural wrangling. This is an appeal to the Government of Canada, and particularly the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, who as I alluded to earlier I believe is in breach of his own code of ethics, his own responsibilities as a member of the bar.

We are saying that we can get this better on behalf of the men and women in the Canadian Forces. We owe it to them.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to speak on Bill C-15, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. As with most bills, there are some good points and some problems with some of the clauses in this particular bill. I will spend most of my time on concerns with changes to the military justice system. I want to outline a few good points that are to the government's credit, but overall the bill does not have the balance that is needed.

Providing for security of tenure for military judges until their retirement is a good proposal. Permitting the appointment of part-time military judges to conclude cases in a timely manner is fine, and specifying the purposes, objectives and principles of the sentencing process makes a lot of sense.

However, the area of concern is that the bill makes amendments to the delegation of the power of the Chief of the Defence Staff as the final authority in the grievance process, and it makes consequential amendments to other acts to make that possible.

The Liberal Party does not believe that introducing a criminal record for Canadian Forces members for certain service offences is fair and just, since the means for pardoning offences has been recently removed by the Conservatives. What Bill C-15 would do is enshrine in law a list of military offences that would carry a criminal record, some of which are hardly appropriate for a criminal record, and others before me have spoken about the seriousness of this measure.

I expect many offices, both on the government side and this side of the House, have dealt with people who have applied for pardons, have found the period has been extended for a longer period of time and as a result have found themselves in an employment category that is probably not as good as they otherwise would have had if they had been able to receive their pardons in a timely fashion. In fact, I have talked to a quite a number of people who said that obtaining a pardon used to carry a reasonable cost but is now very expensive and difficult to afford.

There is an attack by the Government of Canada on people who have, yes, done wrong in life, but punishment is everything on the government side, it seems. Yes, a lot of these people got into trouble, but they can be productive players in Canadian society, and the ability for people to be productive players in Canadian society has been diminished by what the government has done on the pardoning provisions alone, and that hurts us all. It hurts society and it hurts the economy.

Under the new rules, Canadian Forces members would be left haunted by a record, would be unable to find employment upon release and would face greater difficulties in getting a pardon.

Michel Drapeau, who is a retired colonel, noted the following in his committee testimony:

—[an] accused before a summary trial has no right to appeal either the verdict or the sentence. This is despite the fact that the verdict and sentence are imposed without any regard to the minimum standards of procedural rights in criminal proceedings, such as the right to counsel, the presence of rules of evidence, and the right to appeal.

That is a serious matter in terms of the list of military offences, some of which should not be criminal charges, that would affect individuals and individuals' families. As I said, tougher rules to obtain pardons even diminish the ability for folks to contribute to the Canadian economy.

● (1335)

The other very serious matter in the bill that we find extremely problematic is that the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff can intervene and give direction in military and police investigations. The Vice Chief of the Defence Staff is certainly subject to the code of service discipline, but the ability to intervene in a case and maybe deny a case or have more authority in a case is a concern.

I am personally worried by the lack of separation we are seeing in the military justice system. I am worried about the balance of justice, the fairness aspect and in this case, the ability of the command structure to influence and control. As well, as I said earlier when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence was on his feet and laughed at this, thinking it was not possible, I am also worried that the situation in the military of superior authorities influencing decision-making down the line is starting to creep its way into the criminal justice system.

Let me spell out what I mean in that regard. This weekend we found out about the decision of the Conservative government to forbid any RCMP official from meeting with members of Parliament without prior approval from the office of the Minister of Public Safety. That decision carries with it all the implications of the government transforming the RCMP into a Conservative Party security service.

Government Orders

I say that in relation to this bill because we are seeing influence higher up in the chain, whether it is through the military system or now, seemingly, through the civil justice system by the Minister of Public Safety imposing rules that the RCMP is not allowed to talk to members of Parliament unless the minister's office is first notified. It is political influence on the day-to-day policing carried out by Canada's national police force. That is absolutely wrong.

The Minister of Public Safety with the Department of Justice and cabinet designed the law, and that is good and appropriate, but for a minister to be involved practically in the day-to-day affairs of policing is way beyond the pale.

As a former solicitor general, I was well aware that one of the principal obligations was to ensure that there was never a hint of direct political interference in the activities, obligations and duties of the RCMP. That standard of professionalism no longer exists under the current Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety. We found out about that this weekend.

What will this mean? I see what is outlined in Bill C-15 creeping into the civil justice system under the authority of the Minister of Public Safety.

It would mean that before approval of any requests by members of Parliament to meet with members of the RCMP to discuss what at times could be sensitive security issues related to constituents, the political staff within the minister's office will have access to the request and, of serious concern, the reasons for the request. This, in short, will give Conservative Party operatives sensitive information related to individuals, information that should only be shared with law enforcement personnel who have the training and the mandate to have access to that information. That is a serious matter.

Being compelled to inform the political staff in a minister's office about a simple meeting, maybe just over law enforcement in my riding, could jeopardize individuals or investigations. I make that statement in relation to Bill C-15 because it is a recent issue that has not been talked about: the creeping aspect of the authority of the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff in all things related to the military justice system.

●(1340)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's dissertation, and his tinfoil hat may be on just a bit tight.

He talked to Bill C-15, which has been debated through three different bills in three different Parliaments. I really think it is time that we moved on. It may not be perfect in every aspect, but it makes great progress on an issue that is important to the Canadian Forces and it is important to the men and women in the Canadian Forces, who understand it far better than my hon. colleague does.

The members rambled off into other issues that have nothing to do with Bill C-15, other than the aforementioned headpiece. I believe I heard the member say that members of Parliament are being denied the ability to be involved in day-to-day policing. Unless I misheard him, is he saying that members of Parliament should be involved in day-to-day policing discussions with the RCMP?

●(1345)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the member, for whom I have a lot of respect, could not have gotten what I said more backwards than he did.

I raised the issue because of the directive of the Minister of Public Safety to the RCMP, as announced by the Commissioner of the RCMP, to the effect that members of Parliament are not allowed to talk to commanding officers or whomever in the RCMP unless the minister's office is first informed. That is not getting into day-to-day issues of the RCMP from the perspective of the member of Parliament; that is doing our jobs as members of Parliament by talking to commanding officers about policing in a region, talking about what is needed if we see a problem in one area and more personnel are needed on the ground, et cetera.

However, what is terribly wrong about it is that the Minister of Public Safety now is involving himself in day-to-day policing and that operatives, political staff in that minister's office, are going to have to be informed on issues that could be serious concerns that would be better left with the police that are involved.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, but first, I would like to say something about the committee's study of Bill C-15.

The study in committee lasted longer than normal, about four hours. If you look at the committee transcript of those four hours, not one Liberal member spoke. During a four-hour meeting, the Liberals did not speak at all.

I would like to know why they thought it was a good idea not to participate in the four-hour debate in committee and why they are raising these issues now.

Why did his colleague not bring this up in committee when it was studying Bill C-15?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I hate to remind my hon. colleague, but that is what this place is for. It is for debate by those members who do not have the opportunity to sit on that particular committee. It is for us to raise our concerns as individual members. I do not know if it is the same in the NDP as it is in the Conservative Party, where individual members really do not stand in their own right and have their own fair say; however, in the case of our party, our member at the committee basically supported the amendments of the NDP—not quite all, as a few were a little bizarre, but most were supported by our colleague.

The government asked where our amendments were. The fact that no sensible amendments supported by both the NDP and the Liberals got through committee just shows how undemocratic and dictatorial the government side has become.

Members who sit on that committee who are not members of the executive council take their orders from the Prime Minister's Office. They shut down debate and do not allow amendments, and that is why we are getting so much bad legislation in this House, and it is why I am on my feet. This is bad legislation. It sets a bad example in a lot of categories because it would give the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff too much power, and it needs to be changed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about one of the points that my colleague just raised. He spoke about the role of the House of Commons within our Canadian democracy. It is a place where anyone can bring up ideas related to the topic of debate.

I am not a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence. We have an extremely competent critic who is a member of the committee. I was therefore not fully aware of the issue raised by Bill C-15. I had heard about this bill and I had heard that it left a lot to be desired. However, I was not able to examine the issue before the bill made it to the House and we had a chance to examine it more closely.

This once again highlights what an important role the House of Commons plays in our country's democracy. I congratulate our dear colleague who just spoke for bringing up that point.

I would also like to say something about my colleague from Winnipeg North.

• (1350)

[*English*]

I remember when the member for Winnipeg North joined the House of Commons not long ago after a very exciting by-election win in Winnipeg. He brought tremendous experience as a provincial legislator to that race and then to Parliament. I remember being very impressed by his oratorical skills, his ability to speak in Parliament and to get right to the core of an issue so that we could better understand what was at stake in any debate. When I learned that he had been a member of the armed forces I doubly appreciated his public service and what he has done for this country. He joins two eminent Canadians, one of whom is sitting to my left, the member of Parliament for Westmount—Ville-Marie, who also was a member of the military. Not only was he Canada's first astronaut in space, but he was also a member of the naval forces and used his skills and knowledge as an engineer to support that arm of the armed forces. In the Senate we have Senator Roméo Dallaire, a great military man, a great Canadian, a great internationalist, and of course a great Liberal. We have on this side of the House a fair amount of depth when it comes to discussing military issues. I am proud to say that I belong to this caucus.

The government has for years disparaged the opposition by saying that it does not support the military. In any crisis or any situation where the military was discussed with a certain amount of intensity, the government never missed a beat in questioning the esteem with which all members of the House, including members of the opposition, hold members of our military, not only veterans but currently serving members.

Government Orders

I ask members to look south of the border for one minute. I wonder if they can recall a time when, in a crisis or in any other situation, the military has been used as a partisan weapon by one party to attack another. In a crisis, have we heard presidents say members of the other party do not respect the military, do not believe in the military, do not have the best interests of the military at heart? I do not hear that from south of the border, yet that is supposed to be a society so much more divided than ours, so much more polarized than ours.

Government members talk a good game when they talk about supporting the military, but when it comes time to give charter rights to members of the military, they do not talk about such things but rather gloss over them.

I would remind hon. members that two weeks ago was the 31st anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That anniversary day coincided with the day that the new Liberal leader, Justin Trudeau, met with—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:—his caucus for the first time, as leader of the party. That was a fine day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

I would just remind the hon. member, and all others, not to use the names of their colleagues.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I should have known better. I have been in this House long enough to know that.

There was a time when soldiers held a very different position in society. I know that the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering, who no doubt studied history, understands that the role of the military in society has evolved over time. There was probably a time, and he probably knows better than I, when the military was considered somehow on the bottom rungs of society, perhaps there were slaves in the military, and they did not enjoy the same rights as those who governed society or as those who practised other trades.

However, society has evolved and now members of the military, to quote another individual, are equals in society. They are citizens who wear the uniform and show a great deal of commitment to the values upon which this country is based, a commitment so strong that they are prepared to put their lives on the line to promote and to defend those values around the world.

Members of the military are equal members of society. They have a right to the same protections under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and we owe them a great deal.

Let us talk a bit about changing attitudes and about morale.

We know that if we want our men and women in the military, who are volunteers, who put themselves in harm's harm, to do their best for our country, if we want them to protect us with the commitment that they show every day, it is important that they feel respected by society, that they feel they are respected by us, that they are respected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Statements by Members

In this sense, we are talking about enlightened self-interest. It is in our enlightened self-interest to ensure that members of the military have the morale, that they feel the respect that will allow them to do the best job they can on our behalf.

I will get a bit more into the detail of the bill, and it is not all bad. Not every part of the bill is bad. I would remind the House that the bill came out of a process that involved the House of Commons and the Senate. I would like to touch a little on the background of the bill.

The bill originated from recommendations made in a report by the Right Hon. Antonio Lamer, the late former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, as well as from recommendations contained in a report by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, entitled, "Equal Justice: Reforming Canada's System of Court Martials".

I would like to underscore the word "equal", equal justice, in the title of the Senate report. I think this is very important in the context of today's debate because this is really what we are standing up for today, on this side of the House. We are standing up for equality and fair treatment of those like the hon. member for Winnipeg North, like the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, like the hon. Senator Roméo Dallaire, who have committed themselves to protecting this country from what is obviously a very dangerous world, at times.

I think I will end on that note.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1355)

[English]

TRURO BEARCATS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to congratulate the Truro Junior A Bearcats on hosting the Fred Page Cup. The Fred Page Cup is the Eastern Canadian Junior A hockey championship that starts this Wednesday and runs throughout the weekend. The Ontario champion, the Quebec champion, the Maritime champion and the host, Junior A Bearcats, will play to see who gets the right to go to the national championship, the Royal Bank Cup.

I want to congratulate the executive and coach of the Truro Bearcat organization: Stu Rath, the chairman; Keith MacKenzie, the president; and of course Shawn Evans, the head coach.

I cannot wait to be there on Saturday and Sunday when the Truro Bearcats raise the cup above their heads and claim victory. Go Bearcats, go.

* * *

[Translation]

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each year, thousands of people offer their time to an organization, for free, to help those in need. Each act of volunteerism

has a profound, positive impact on society as a whole. Given that the current government demonstrates nothing but a lack of commitment towards those most in need, volunteerism is taking on immeasurable value.

In the past year, I have had the opportunity to pay tribute to the following people and their commitment to volunteering by presenting each of them with a Queen's Jubilee Medal: Marika Draper, Raymond Simard, Celina Yarish, Howard W. Graham, Joseph Henri Dollis, Michel Gendreau, Georgette Dulude Fyfe, Daniel Villeneuve and Bernard Boyer.

I would also like to congratulate Pauline Miron Gaudreau, who was recently awarded a medal by the National Assembly for her more than 50-year involvement in various community organizations, including the Marie-Reine association in Saint-Constant, which raises money to help abused women. As National Volunteer Week just ended, I would like to wholeheartedly thank these generous volunteers.

* * *

● (1400)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Friday marked a historic day for environmental and energy sustainability. The first barrel of oil flowed from Imperial Oil's new Kearl oil sands facility near Fort McMurray.

What makes this really historic is that Kearl produces a barrel of oil from the oil sands at a comparable greenhouse gas emission level to refineries producing conventional oil in the U.S. That is right. In fact, studies show that Kearl oil has a GHG level below that of California's heavy oil.

High-tech innovation is greening our oil sands. Kearl is Imperial Oil's finest achievement to date and its largest at \$30 billion, showing that energy, the economy and the environment can work together to benefit all Canadians.

This is just one of the amazing innovative environmental achievements that our world-leading energy companies are using as they unlock our oil sands potential.

* * *

HARRY HUNTINGTON AND LLOYD MACDONALD

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to two great Cape Breton community leaders who recently passed away. Mr. Harry Huntington of Marion Bridge and Mr. Lloyd MacDonald of Ironville.

Harry, a native of Cape Breton, was a successful businessman and innovator, while also offering his time to numerous community events and organizations. He was a passionate farmer and I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with him on several agricultural projects in Central America. Harry was also an author. He wrote the story of his life and incorporated a lot of Cape Breton's local history into his work. I offer my deepest condolences to Harry's wife Wilma, a true lady, and to his family and friends.

Statements by Members

Lloyd, better known as “Tokyo Lloyd”, not only sold many cars, but created many jobs and gave back to the community. He also played a mean fiddle. It was always heartwarming joining him and his family at Loaves and Fishes every Christmas Eve. I offer my deepest condolences to his wife, Winnie, his family and friends.

Cape Breton will miss them both dearly.

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MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to a disease that has ravaged the Canadian population for many years. Multiple sclerosis, MS, is the most common neurological disease affecting young adults in Canada. It is a devastating disease that ravages the body. Sadly, our nation has one of the highest rates of MS in the world.

The MS walks will take place this weekend. I am proud to be volunteering again, just as I was humbled to be named the honorary chair of the MS Walkathon when I was pregnant. I loved fundraising for their read-a-thons with schoolmates 25 years ago.

I encourage members of Parliament on both sides of the House to get involved and help Canadians in the fight against MS.

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[*Translation*]

HOCHELAGA

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 6, the new Rio Tinto Alcan Planetarium opened its doors in my riding. Thanks to its outstanding cutting-edge exhibits that transport us throughout the Milky Way, Montreal will shine brighter than ever before. The Planetarium is part of Space for Life, which includes the Insectarium, the Biodôme and the Botanical Garden.

On June 22, the beauty of our wonderful Botanical Garden will be reinvented when Mosaïcultures Internationales returns to Montreal after a 10-year hiatus. Some 50 majestic works of horticultural art will be on display. People of all ages are invited to Hochelaga to explore the planets that surround us and learn to appreciate and protect biodiversity in our communities.

These four signature Montreal institutions are definitely worth the trip. Together, they honour nature and science and truly are a Space for Life.

* * *

[*English*]

DON MCLEAN WESTACRES POOL

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the oldest outdoor pool in Mississauga will continue to serve the Applewood community for decades to come, thanks to the vision and hard work of my constituents, together with the support of our government.

It was my privilege recently to announce that our Conservative government is providing \$990,000 through the community infrastructure improvement fund for the renovation of the Don McLean Westacres pool.

This pool had not had an update in almost 50 years and was not scheduled for one for quite a few more years. This changed when Brenda Morris, Paulette Rende, Christine Crockett and other local moms started talking to their neighbours about how important it would be to have the pool renovated to allow children with disabilities to have full access.

I am delighted to work with the city once again and would like to thank Ward 1 Councillor Jim Tovey for his persistence in getting the pool on the agenda for discussion at city council.

The pool was renamed Don McLean Westacres to honour the man who led the original fundraising drive for the pool more than 50 years ago.

Then, as now, this pool served as a symbol of the vibrant and enduring Applewood community spirit and a reminder of what can be achieved by the power of moms.

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● (1405)

PENNIES AND MORE FOR POLIO

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to highlight Rotary International's Pennies and More for Polio initiative.

In Canada, Rotarians raised \$2.2 million through Pennies and More for Polio, which was matched dollar for dollar by CIDA and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In total, \$6.8 million was raised, which will support the immunization of millions of children. We have seen great success in stamping out this disease, and the eradication of polio will continue until the few vulnerable pockets are cleansed.

I extend special recognition to my constituent, Dr. Robert Scott, for his commitment and leadership as chair of Rotary International's polio eradication committee.

I applaud the successful efforts of my fellow Rotarians in Canada who surpassed their goal in collecting funds to combat this debilitating disease.

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[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, in this very chamber, we had the first hour of debate on my bill.

Statements by Members

This bill, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (funeral arrangements), would help lift seniors out of poverty and provide peace of mind for their heirs. My NDP colleagues and I are very committed to this bill. It seems that our Liberal colleagues also support it.

The cost of the measure in Bill C-480, which will provide real assistance for our seniors and their families, is \$132,400 a year. As incredible as it may seem, the Conservative government has indicated that it will vote against the bill.

It seems that an annual investment of less than an MP's or senator's salary in order to reduce poverty among Canadian seniors is too rich for the Conservatives.

I invite the Prime Minister and his caucus to set partisanship aside for once and to work with us to reduce poverty among seniors. The most—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Fundy Royal.

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[English]

BRAIN AND NEUROLOGICAL RESEARCH

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to our government's announcement to provide matching funds for innovative research through our support for Brain Canada.

We know that innovative research will reduce the burden of neurological disease on Canadians. It can help us learn how to prevent neurological diseases from developing. It will foster development of innovative tools to make early diagnosis. It can also lead to discoveries that will improve treatment.

Our government supports working with the private sector on research. We have doubled the funds available for this project by matching private funds.

Today's announcement is the result of a collaborative effort by the W. Garfield Weston Foundation, Brain Canada, the Krembil Foundation and others.

I am proud of our government's leadership on brain and neurological research, and we look forward to seeing the lives of Canadians improved as a result.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week was World Immunization Week, which gives me an excellent opportunity to remind everyone that immunization is one of the best public health tools at our disposal to prevent disease. This has never been clearer to me than it was during my recent trip to Malawi at the invitation of Results Canada.

I saw first-hand the effects of immunization on families and especially their communities. I saw hundreds of women and children waiting for their injection.

While immunization is a trivial matter to us here in Canada, it provides those women and children with hope for a better, healthier life. Canada must continue funding immunization clinics to ensure that such a future remains possible for all.

* * *

[English]

WAR OF 1812

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 200 years ago during the War of 1812, British, Canadian and first nations defenders fought in the Battle of York, which helped shape the Canada we know today. Their sacrifice deserves to be remembered.

On April 27, 1813, American invaders attacked from across Lake Ontario, outnumbering and out-powering our forces. American soldiers set fire to the Parliament, Government House, several public buildings and the shipyard.

Despite this setback, however, our soldiers were able to rebuild these fortifications. The fight for Canada was far from over.

With a combined effort, English and French militia, first nations and Metis allies, and British military forces were able to defend our borders. Together, they were able to repel the invasion.

Without the War of 1812, Canada as we know it would not exist. Let us remember the sacrifices that were made in the past so that we can celebrate the Canada we all know and love today.

* * *

● (1410)

WINNERS OF THE CBC SEARCHLIGHT COMPETITION

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the musical band, Sherman Downey and the Ambiguous Case, winner of the CBC Searchlight music contest. Lead singer Sherman Downey is originally from the Codroy Valley, in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

Sherman, along with fellow band members, Andrew Ross, Paul Lockyer, Bill Allan and Neil Targett, recently won the national competition over 3,000 other Canadian musical acts. During the voting process, no one was more involved in actively seeking votes for the band than Sherman's 85-year-old grandmother, Margaret Aucoin, who lives in South Branch in the Codroy Valley.

As winners, they will perform at the CBC music festival in Toronto on May 25, and be featured in a video, as well as receive \$20,000 in musical equipment.

The music business is highly competitive, and those who succeed do so through talent, hard work and determination. Clearly this group has all three in abundance.

I ask all members to join me in wishing Sherman Downey and the Ambiguous Case success in the music industry forever.

VICTIMS' FAMILIES

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Omar Ahmed Khadr is a known supporter of al Qaeda and a convicted terrorist.

He pleaded guilty to providing material support for terrorism, spying, attempted murder in violation of the law of war, and the murder in violation of the law of war of Sergeant Christopher Speer, an American army medic.

While this individual attempts to take back his own words and recant his guilty plea, he is simply re-victimizing the family of Sergeant Speer. This individual was even transferred to Canada based on his acceptance of the charges and of his own sentence.

I call on this individual to show some remorse and to allow the family of Sergeant Speer to grieve their loss without reopening old wounds.

* * *

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the big partisan circus that is the Conservative caucus, all members, whether they are ministers or backbenchers, are forced to repeat the PMO's favourite line: "You voted against it."

These free-thinking Conservatives did not speak out against omnibus bills, gag orders or in camera meetings. No, they are concerned only about their own privileges.

They will continue to spout whatever is on the cheat sheet Ottawa has provided, and they will blame the opposition for voting against the budget.

Thanks to this ridiculous, simplistic logic, we now know that the Minister of National Defence is against veterans, because he voted against \$17 million for St. Anne's Hospital.

The Minister of Human Resources is against affordable housing, because she voted against \$1.6 billion in funding for affordable housing in 2005.

Canadians deserve better. They deserve an honest government and, in 2015, they can count on the NDP.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during a troubled global economy, our government is standing tall for Canadians and remains focused on creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Since the depths of the recession, our government has helped create more than 900,000 net new jobs. In fact, Canada is the only G7 country with a top credit rating and stable outlook from all major agencies. The OECD projects that Canada will lead the G7 in economic growth over the next 50 years, and KPMG ranked Canada the most tax-competitive economy among mature markets.

Oral Questions

Now is not the time to raise taxes or travel to Washington to argue against Canadian jobs. It is not the time to implement a \$20 billion job-killing carbon tax. It is not the time for \$56 billion in reckless spending.

On this side of the House, we urge the Leader of the Opposition and his party to come clean on their shameful tax hikes and—

The Speaker: Order, please. Oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1415)

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago the Conservatives created a new accelerated approval process for hiring temporary foreign workers. They allowed them to be paid 15% less than Canadian workers doing the same job. That is an incentive to hire temporary foreign workers instead of Canadians.

Today, Conservatives are begging Canadians to believe that this time they are really going to crack down, but Conservatives have not removed the incentive to hire temporary foreign workers. Why have they not changed the 15% rule? Their message is still, "Work for less or you'll be replaced".

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): As always on this matter, Mr. Speaker, the NDP is wrong. I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition has been improperly briefed or whether he knows he is wrong when he says that the rules allow for foreign workers to be underpaid. That is not true. People cannot come into our country to work on work permits unless they are paid at the prevailing regional wage rate. However, of course, in every occupation there is a range and this allows for some people to be paid as long as Canadians are paid within that range at the same wage level.

The bottom line is the NDP members keep asking for more foreign workers and we are doing what we can to fix the problems in —

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Ah, yes, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

This morning, the Parliamentary Budget Officer indicated that 14,000 Canadians will lose their jobs as a result of the Conservatives' budget. If these workers do not agree to a 15% wage cut, the Conservatives will replace them with temporary foreign workers. If they do not agree to a 30% wage cut, the Conservatives will take away their employment insurance.

The message the Conservatives are sending to 14,000 Canadians is that they must agree to a pay cut or lose everything. Why?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Leader of the Opposition has it all wrong.

We are overhauling the employment insurance system to help unemployed Canadians find jobs in their region that correspond to their skills.

We find it odd that some employers are unable to find local workers, even in regions with high unemployment. That is a problem and we must fix it. We must encourage unemployed workers to accept jobs that are available in their region.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 55,000 jobs were lost last month. That is the Conservative record.

If Canadian workers will not accept a 15% pay cut, and that is what is written in the rules, Conservatives will allow them to be replaced by temporary foreign workers. If the unemployed will not accept a 30% pay cut, Conservatives will kick them off EI. Now Conservatives are allowing U.S. Steel to lock out 1,000 workers in Nanticoke, Ontario, despite their solemn promise to keep those jobs in Canada.

Is this the Conservatives' latest message to Canadians, "If you don't work for less, we'll ship your jobs south to the U.S.?"

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): The fact is that the leader of the NDP is reinforcing his reputation for demagoguery, Mr. Speaker. He knows perfectly well that there is a labour dispute at that steel operation. He knows perfectly well that this government insisted on undertakings when U.S. Steel acquired Stelco and that we sought to enforce those undertakings, which resulted in an agreement where U.S. Steel agreed to keep producing steel at those operations for four years and to make major capital investments.

There is a labour dispute that is regulated by provincial labour law, and the Leader of the Opposition should know better than that.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer is cold comfort to the hundreds of locked-out workers at U.S. Steel.

The Conservatives completely lost control of the temporary foreign workers program. Originally, it brought in a small number of workers. Now it is massive, pays them less, displaces Canadians and drives down wages for everyone. Even Mark Carney agrees the current program is good for neither workers nor our economy.

Now that the minister has finally acknowledged we have been right all along, will he reverse the changes that drive down wages by 15%? Will he put jobs for Canadians first?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): I think I am pretty clear now, Mr. Speaker. The NDP knows it is making this up. It must know that no employer can invite someone from abroad to work for less than what Canadians are paid in the same job, at the same workplace. To suggest otherwise is absolutely, categorically false.

What is interesting is I have this stack of letters from NDP members of Parliament asking for more temporary foreign workers

in their constituencies. The members opposite know who they are. They come up to me all the time. While they are seeking to increase the number of foreign workers in their constituencies, we are working to ensure the program works for the Canadian economy.

● (1420)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no New Democrat has asked the minister to displace Canadian jobs.

The Conservatives have twice claimed to fix the program, but each time they have only made matters worse. No one trusts the Conservatives to clean up the mess that they have created.

Whistleblowers have recently come forward to expose that thousands of unqualified foreign workers are being brought in to replace Canadians through a loophole known as the intra-company transfer. Like with so many other problems, the minister has known about this abuse for years. Therefore, why have the Conservatives failed to act?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The NDP is suggesting that the temporary foreign worker program always displaces Canadians and yet it wants more temporary foreign workers to come into Canada. I went to a heritage committee hearing a couple of months ago where the NDP members were attacking the government for not making it easier to bring in people more quickly to work in the computer gaming programming business in Montreal. They said that the government was being far too rigid in the way that it applied the rules, seeking to ensure the employers offered the jobs to Canadians first.

The NDP policy is to say one thing but do another.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 2010, the government has increased EI premiums by 8.7% on Canadians. That is equivalent to about \$1.8 billion in new taxes on Canadians.

With 1.4 million Canadians unemployed, an EI premium is a payroll tax that will discourage job creation and will take more money out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians. It is simply bad fiscal management.

When the economy is so fragile, why is the government increasing EI premiums?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the EI program has to be balanced over the long run.

Oral Questions

Let us be clear about this. The Liberals want to increase premiums far more significantly because they support the NDP plan to substantially increase EI benefits. Guess who pays for that? Workers and employers through higher premiums.

Why are the Liberals criticizing the balanced approach that we are taking when they would seek billions of dollars of additional premiums, when they would repeal our two points off the GST and tens of billions of other dollars in tax relief provided by this government?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer told us today that the next seven hikes in EI premiums will result in approximately \$4.5 billion in new taxes.

What is more, without these new taxes, the government will be unable to balance its budget in 2015. This would be the Conservative government's eighth consecutive deficit.

Why do Canadians have to pay for this government's fiscal incompetence?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that the measures contained in the 2013 economic action plan's economic and fiscal update will have a positive impact on real GDP and employment in 2013.

It therefore said the opposite. We have cut taxes by \$200 million. Taxes are the lowest they have been since 1965. The Liberals want to raise Canadians' taxes, which will kill jobs in Canada. That is not a responsible approach.

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's youth unemployment rate is at 14.2% at a time when many young Canadians are working this summer without getting paid or they are not even working, yet the government is decreasing young people's employment services in our country.

Do the Conservatives not realize that they are literally creating a new generation of young Canadians who cannot acquire the necessary skills to work independently and productively for our country?

Why does the government not realize it? Why is it not creating youth—

• (1425)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. minister of citizenship and immigration.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no modern Canadian government has done more than this to help create employment, particularly for new Canadians and young Canadians: over 900,000 net new jobs have been created since the global economic downturn, the best economic and job-creation record in the G7; the Canada job grant; incentives for apprenticeships and skills training; the hiring

credit for small business; and various targeted measures to help young Canadians find their way into the workforce.

What is the record of the Liberal leader on youth employment? When he was running Katimavik, it was costing \$28,000 per participant with a one-third dropout rate. That is a record of failure.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing about the Minister of Natural Resources, he sure is consistent. He will always say things that are embarrassing to Canadians. After making up bogus science, claiming that a 2° rise in global temperatures somehow is not a real problem, he has now attacked a respected former NASA scientist. Now, this is a real rocket scientist, which the minister clearly is not.

When is the minister going to start listening to the science and to the experts who spent their lives fighting this major threat? When is he going to stop taking his orders from oil industry lobbyists?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said any number of times, the minister has reiterated time and again in any number of venues just how important this government considers the issue of climate change.

Climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution. I would remind the member that our government is the first Canadian government to actually reduce greenhouse gases.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, the Conservatives took aim at science, and now they are taking aim at environmental assessments.

Natural resource development projects have just been given carte blanche. Heavy oil and oil sands processing facilities, pipelines and industrial mineral mines will no longer be subject to environmental assessments.

Are the Conservatives aware that this new attack on environmental protection will have negative economic repercussions?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, responsible resource development is a cornerstone of the work that we have done to ensure stringent environmental protection. A publication of the amended project list I believe shows that we have achieved the right balance.

When it comes to protecting the environment, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency will review and assess those major projects that have the greatest potential for significant impact.

Oral Questions

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did he say, “the right balance”? What the government is now proposing to do is to take away environmental assessments for heavy oil and oil sands processing facilities, pipelines, electrical transmission lines, chemical explosives plants and industrial mineral mines, just when we thought our environmental assessment regime could not get any weaker.

Why are the Conservatives only listening to industry on this file? Why are they rejecting a responsible approach to environmental assessments?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is simply wrong. Included on the project list, for example, are those projects which would involve expansion of oil sands mines and exploratory offshore drilling, just to name a couple. We have consulted with the provinces, with industry and we offered, although to no avail, to hear from first nation groups on this matter.

That said, the gazetting of these regulations will begin a 30-day consultation period, which will inform our decisions when we finalize the project list.

* * *

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives seem much more interested in controlling the RCMP than they are in controlling pollution.

On Friday, the Conservatives categorically denied that meetings between the RCMP and members of Parliament had to be approved by the minister's office. Now we know that the Conservatives told the opposite of the truth and that, furthermore, the minister is counting on this form of censorship to prevent the RCMP from contradicting him.

Is the minister aware that the RCMP's mandate is not to protect his political agenda?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of the RCMP will meet with whom he chooses when he chooses. It is also appropriate that he approve meetings of his staff.

The appropriate place for parliamentarians to interact with officials, RCMP or otherwise, is at parliamentary committees. If that member has concerns relating to the RCMP, I would encourage her to bring them to me.

However, let me be clear. None of this impacts the ability of any member to speak with his or her local RCMP or law enforcement on other local matters.

• (1430)

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, well, if censoring meetings with parliamentarians is the only way the minister can keep tabs on this file, then we have a serious problem.

The RCMP must be able to operate without the shadow of political interference. Instead of encouraging transparency and open communication with parliamentarians, the minister has made

negative consequences for the government, which is something they need to worry about.

When will the minister stop muzzling the RCMP to protect himself from accountability?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member has any concerns about the RCMP in her riding, she can either bring those concerns to me or she can deal with the RCMP directly.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the RCMP could speak freely to parliamentarians, we would hear a lot about the failure of the government's law and order agenda.

The provinces are starting to feel the pinch of all those downloaded costs. For example, in Alberta, overcrowding in prisons and employee safety issues have led to unprecedented job action. The government's job is to listen so that it can implement the best public policy decisions, not keep the minister happy. Is the minister aware that muzzling the RCMP is bad for public safety?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that party indicated that our tough on crime approach would increase the cost of the construction of prisons by \$19 billion. In fact, it was \$500 million. That member, I know, opposes any measure to hold prisoners or criminals accountable through the utilization of prisons. We take a very different approach than that member does to keeping Canadians safe.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVACY

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives want to control everything, but the one thing they cannot control is privacy breaches.

Thousands of Canadians have had their confidential information compromised by the Conservatives. It took more than 3,000 data breaches before the Privacy Commissioner was informed. She did not know about them. That is serious.

What did the Conservatives do when they found out? Nothing.

The commissioner has made it clear that these breaches are very disturbing.

Will the government commit to systematically informing the commissioner of all breaches? And when, for heaven's sake, will they take real steps to keep these breaches from happening?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the majority of these breaches happened years ago, and they resulted in measures to ensure that Canadians' privacy is protected.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION***[English]*

Of course, we take any loss of Canadians' personal information seriously. It is unacceptable, which is why we are and have been taking action to strengthen privacy protection.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is pretty clear that the minister does not seem capable of protecting the privacy information of Canadians. The extent of these breaches is staggering. They are losing Canadians' personal data almost every 48 hours.

When Canadian seniors file their taxes online, they should not have to worry that their SIN number, their address and their financial information is going to be lost or hacked. So will he agree to the New Democrats' proposal that he turn over these cases to the Privacy Commissioner and then come clean with the more than one million Canadians who have had their data lost, hacked or stolen?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have done better than that. I am already in the process of arranging a meeting with the Privacy Commissioner to discuss the situation, and certainly I will take seriously her recommendations, more so than their recommendations, because theirs are tainted by ideology, of course.

What we have done so far, of course, is that we have the veterans privacy action plan, mandatory reporting of breaches to the Privacy Commissioner and new guidelines to prevent and stop privacy breaches. We are taking this seriously. We have taken it seriously, and we will take it seriously in the future.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it took the New Democratic investigation into his incompetence, and he is going to hold the meeting.

When he bragged about creating open government, he did not tell Canadians it was open for fraudsters and cyberthieves. The extent of this breach is staggering. More than one million Canadians have had their data lost or stolen, and in only 13% of the cases has he come clean with the Privacy Commissioner, which means that he has left Canadians in the dark about their information being stolen. It is not good enough in an age of cyberfraud and identity theft. Will the minister come clean with Canadians and tell them who has been affected, how much data has been lost and why they have been left high and dry by the minister?

• (1435)

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we have new procedures in place. Since this government was elected in 2006, we have taken these privacy breaches seriously, and I am looking forward to engaging with the Privacy Commissioner to see what else can be done. That is how leadership works.

They can stand in the House and try to impart motives to us. We are actually taking it seriously. We have done things in the past to improve privacy. We will do things in the future as well.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the Conservatives are nickel and diming middle-class families, but the Prime Minister also continues to target the pockets of seniors. This all started when he announced that seniors will have to wait longer to get their OAS, a move that will cost pensioners approximately \$12,000 each. Now tariffs have been added to this burden, as if they did not have enough, forcing seniors to pay even more for everything from blankets to home heating oil to food and housewares.

The Prime Minister has lowered seniors' already stressed incomes while increasing their daily expenses. Enough is enough. Could the Prime Minister please show some compassion—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, preferential tariffs are a form of foreign aid that are designed to help underdeveloped countries. Countries such as China now have an economy four times the size of the Canadian economy. I would expect the hon. member to support Canadian workers, Canadian manufacturers and Canadian businesses and not Chinese businesses in China, which, as I say, is a much larger economy.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are taxes on Canadian families, not the Chinese.

Changes to employment insurance are penalizing middle-class income earners and their families. Instead of helping those who have lost a job through no fault of their own, the government is forcing people to take low-paying jobs, travel long distances away from their families, and incur increased transportation costs and child care costs, all at a time when money is already tight.

Will the government finally reverse these reckless changes to EI?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, those are actually completely false statements. The government has been focused on making sure the changes to EI provide opportunities for Canadians. Budget 2013 actually provides a significant number of opportunities for Canadians to gain skills and enter into the workforce.

I encourage members opposite to support the budget, support the Canada job grant, support apprenticeships and support youth, because those are the things we need to do to make sure Canada's economy is growing.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, did the parliamentary secretary listen to the 50,000 protesters in Montreal on Saturday? Did she hear their cries? Did she hear the concerns of employers who may well lose their skilled workers? Is she insensitive to all that? Is she so bent on following her Prime Minister's orders that she is covering her ears?

The government has made changes that have diminished the protection provided under employment insurance to middle- and low-income families. The government did so with no consultation and no studies. Can the parliamentary secretary cite a single study to support the completely crazy proposals her government is making to Canadian workers?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whether it be the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development or me or others in this government, we have done extensive consultations across the country. I can list every single place I have been for the member opposite, if he would like.

Really, what is important here is making sure that Canadians have access to employment insurance when they need it, and that is guaranteed with this government. I encourage members opposite to support the budget and make sure that Canadians get the skills they need so they can enter into the workforce and grow the economy of this country.

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*[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT**

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are still unconcerned about Canada's youth employment crisis, yet the long-term impact can have disastrous ramifications.

The salary gap among young people, which will take years—if not decades—to fill, means billions of dollars less for our economy. Nonetheless, the minister is still not meeting the expectations of 280,000 young people who lost their jobs during the crisis. Most still have no job today.

When will the minister come up with a concrete plan to address this crisis?

● (1440)

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned already in the House today, budget 2013 focuses on giving skills and employment opportunities to Canadians, particularly young Canadians. The Canada job grant, opportunities for apprenticeships, the 5,000 new internships—these are all opportunities for young Canadians.

I encourage members opposite, that member in particular, to support this budget. They will be providing opportunities for young Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary should explain to us why young Canadians are still unemployed, despite all the measures that she keeps bragging about. Her measures are just not working.

As the Parliamentary Budget Officer said in her report, the problem with the so-called Conservative plan to create jobs is that it does not create any jobs. It is making jobs disappear. In 2005, the minister voted against \$1.6 billion for social housing, which was a good measure for young people.

Instead of saying that I voted against her bad budget, could the parliamentary secretary tell us what her concrete plan is to get our young people working?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not here in 2005. I was practising medicine at the University of Western Ontario.

Let us be very clear. Budget 2013 would provide significant opportunities for young Canadians. Whether that be the Canada job grant or numerous other opportunities, the members opposite have that chance.

The NDP voting record to support youth is actually quite remarkable, whether that is voting against Canada summer jobs, voting against the youth employment strategy, voting against the apprenticeship completion grants or voting against the apprenticeship incentive grants. These are all things for young Canadians. Why do they not support them?

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*[Translation]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative defence cuts are having a serious impact on Canadian Forces members and communities across the country. Consider, for example, the whole fiasco of danger pay for soldiers in Afghanistan.

There is more. According to new information, the Conservatives are about to go after air cadet flight training. Every year, this inexpensive program allows thousands of young people to discover the joy of flying.

Do the Conservatives plan to cut the air cadets' budget or not?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I can assure the hon. member is that we will not be cutting the cadet program, and I can assure the member that we will continue to make increases in the budget of the Department of National Defence. I can also assure the House that this member and her party will continue to vote against those increases. We have seen it throughout our time in government.

Oral Questions

Of course, what we will do, as well, is continue to review programs to look at ways in which they can become more effective and deliver better results.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the people who run the gliding program are being told. Under this Minister of National Defence, we have seen spending on consultants and contractors skyrocket to more than \$3.2 billion. How do they pay for such waste? First, they cut the danger pay to our men and women serving in Afghanistan, and now they are cutting a program that has motivated generations of young Canadians—air cadets—to learn how to fly. The RCAF says that glider training is fundamental to the air cadet program.

This minister should be encouraging young people. Is he or is he not slashing this important glider training program for young air cadets?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is more rambling misinformation from the member. We have come to expect that.

I can assure the House that the cadet program will continue to enjoy this important use of gliders. In fact, we continue to review and assess the effectiveness of programs, but there is no decision with respect to the cadet glider program. What we see constantly is the member trying to create a crisis and then pretending that somehow he is putting out the fire.

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HEALTH

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the pressure placed on individuals, families and caregivers dealing with brain disorders. Today the Minister of Health, in collaboration with Brain Canada and the W. Garfield Weston Foundation, announced matching funds to support innovative research through Brain Canada.

Would the Minister of Health inform this House what our Conservative government is doing to support brain research in Canada?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to partner with Brain Canada and the W. Garfield Weston Foundation to support innovative research that could bring new hope to patients and families dealing with brain illnesses. Our government committed to match up to \$100 million of private funding for the Canada Brain research fund that will support the very best Canadian brain research.

In addition to today's announcement, we have invested over \$870 million in neuroscience research. Our government will continue to support working with the private sector on research initiatives like the one announced today.

● (1445)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the second time in just a few months, the American Food and Drug Administration is sounding the alarm about the safety of drugs made by Canadian manufacturer Apotex.

The FDA, which has sent several notices of violation to Apotex, is going as far as threatening to prohibit it from accessing the American market. Why? Because the factory does not meet safety standards.

How can the Minister of Health justify this situation?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada officials, after inspecting the facility and receiving an independent analysis, have advised my office that they have no evidence of any impact on health products destined for the Canadian market. The Canadian regulatory system insists that all manufacturers comply with our strict rules, and regulators will not hesitate to take any action if there is evidence of any risk to health.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the third time in less than a month that Canadian pharmaceuticals have been in the news for poor quality control. Why? Because Health Canada continues to fall behind on drug safety for Canadians. Apparently it is okay for the government to leave it to the U.S. to do Canada's job.

Why are the Conservatives cutting hundreds of millions of dollars from Health Canada and not investing in comprehensive drug safety measures for Canadians? The minister has to be accountable for that.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this government that has increased health transfers to the provinces and territories. Our government is committed to protecting the health and safety of Canadians, and we are proposing an interim solution to ensure that all drug service providers fall within federal and provincial regulations.

We plan to work closely with the provinces and territories to address the situation as quickly as possible.

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PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we have been raising the Apotex alarm for weeks and the government is still failing to listen.

In response to allegations of corruption, the World Bank has banned SNC-Lavalin from bidding on contracts with the World Bank for the 10 years. In keeping with international practice, CIDA has now extended that ban as well to SNC-Lavalin.

Oral Questions

The question I have is for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services is this. Why has she not also adjusted her integrity rules for procurement to give consideration to allegations of corruption in other nations?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that premise is somewhat out of context. I should assure the hon. member that our government expects Canadian businesses to play by the rule and we have directed certain investigations to be done with the World Bank to ascertain that those rules are being followed.

Our government will continue to protect taxpayer dollars and ensure they are getting tangible results for those most in need around the world.

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[Translation]

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the mechanisms used to award and monitor contracts handed out by Public Works are clearly flawed.

The minister continues to change her version of the story concerning companies suspected of collusion and corruption.

Public Works can keep doing business with SNC-Lavalin, whereas CIDA and the World Bank have banned the company from bidding on their projects.

Will the minister put in place clear directives to standardize the ethics guidelines for awarding government contracts?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has put in place measures to ensure the appropriate use of taxpayers' money.

These measures include an integrity framework to ensure that we do not do business with criminals.

In fact, the integrity framework's list of offences rendering companies and individuals ineligible to bid on contracts was recently expanded.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no fewer than 30 major government programs are slated for cuts of more than 25% over the next two years. These include 10 major environmental programs, food inspection and aviation and marine safety.

In light of these massive cuts, how can the government possibly pretend that is just cleaning up some backroom operations, when everybody knows that what it is doing is delivering big cuts in public services to middle-class Canadians?

● (1450)

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we did not take a page from the Liberal government of the 1990s, where it slashed health care transfers and other social transfers. We examined our back office operations. We found ways to do better with less with the taxpayer dollars. We ensured that we protected essential services for Canadians, especially when it comes to health care and other transfers.

It was all embodied in a wonderful couple of documents, budget 2012 and economic action plan 2013, delivered by our fine Minister of Finance.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how could the minister be so far off base in terms of his answer? Conservative service cuts across the board are affecting the middle class and undermining key industries.

In Malpeque Bay Harbour this weekend, on Stanley Bridge, I listened to frustrated fishermen about the cuts to DFO in terms of dredging, standing there with their hands in their pockets, worried the dredging would not be done so they could set their traps today.

Is there not one minister over there who will step up and accept the responsibility for these cuts that are affecting Canadians?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the dredging program through small craft harbours is intact. It is the same funding it has always been funded.

* * *

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday almost 1,000 steelworkers were locked out of the U.S. Steel plant in Nanticoke. This is the third time this has happened since U.S. Steel has been allowed to come into the country by the Conservatives.

Bill Ferguson, president of USW Local 8782, said that the gates were now closed on one of the most productive and efficient steel mills in North America.

When will the Conservatives stop selling out our manufacturing sector and enforce the investment Canada Act?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, our thoughts are with the workers and their families.

I urge the opposition members to stop playing demagoguery with this issue. We all know this is a labour dispute under provincial laws. They know very well that we did not hesitate to take actions in the past to ensure it was compliant with its requirements. Once again, I urge the opposition to stop playing demagoguery.

Oral Questions

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just wish that member would put away those tired talking points and explain exactly where the net benefit is to Canada for these workers.

What was in the court settlement that should have addressed those issues that brought U.S. Steel to court in the first place: maintaining jobs and local production? Now these workers have been betrayed again.

When will the government admit it was a mistake to allow U.S. Steel to come to Canada to take over Stelco and admit, as well, that it sold out Canadians workers?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, this is a labour dispute under provincial laws. It is a shame to see that the opposition would block all forms of foreign investment. What it would rather propose, as we heard at its convention, is the nationalization of steel companies. This is way off base and irresponsible.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cornerstone of budget 2013 is skills training and job creation. This is why our government has committed in the budget to bring forward changes to the temporary foreign worker program to better ensure that Canadians always have first crack at available jobs.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development please update the House on the government's commitment to bringing forward these changes?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government committed, in budget 2013, to bring forward changes to the temporary foreign worker program. Later today, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and the Minister of Immigration will be announcing the details of our government's reforms.

While the NDP and Liberal MPs demand more temporary foreign workers, we have actually committed to fix this program.

I call on the opposition members to support these efforts and to vote for budget 2013.

* * *

●(1455)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, real cowboys describe fake cowboys as “all hat and no horses”.

With 977 veterans registered in the Helmets to Hardhats program, it has produced just 18 jobs. In spite of the fact that it is a much ballyhooed program, it is all hot air and no help.

Instead of a fake program, why does the minister not design a program that will actually help real veterans get real jobs in real time?

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very proud to participate in a donation from a very large corporate partner just two weeks ago, funding the Helmets to Hardhats initiative. This is a critical initiative that assists our veterans in transitioning from military life to civilian life.

However, it is not the only thing we are doing. We are also providing all sorts of assistance, whether it is providing educational assistance to the veterans or to their family members, right down to assisting the entire family to transition into civilian life. Our government stands up for our veterans.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of people from the Lower St. Lawrence travelled 14 hours to participate in the massive protest in Montreal on Saturday. Their message was clear: the Conservatives need to stop gutting employment insurance. Not a day goes by in my riding without an inn or a summer theatre realizing that it needs to rebuild more than a quarter of its staff because of this reform. Tourism in the regions is seasonal, and it requires specialized workers.

Will the Conservatives stop showing such disdain for seasonal industries and their workers? Will they finally take the needs of thousands of small businesses in Quebec and eastern Canada seriously?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned earlier in the House today, the changes to the employment insurance program are about better connecting Canadians to available jobs.

What we have put forward in budget 2013 is about creating an opportunity to build skills and provide opportunities to Canadians to be connected into the economy.

I encourage the members opposite to please support the Canada job grant, apprenticeships and our 5,000 internships and ensure Canadians have opportunities to build the skills they need so they contribute to the economy.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for seven consecutive years, our government has sent a clear message that violence against women, wherever it occurs, cannot be tolerated. However, women on reserves are being abused and victimized without the protections they need. We believe aboriginal women deserve the same rights and protection as all Canadians.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women please tell the House what our government is doing to protect thousands of aboriginal women on reserves?

Routine Proceedings

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Miramichi for her hard work on the status of women committee.

We introduced matrimonial property rights legislation that would finally allow judges to enforce emergency protection orders that would save lives and protect women from violence.

Aboriginal women, international organizations and even the Manitoba NDP have been calling for this for many years, but shockingly, the Liberal leader has instructed his caucus to vote against this protection. We call on him to reverse his position now.

I am proud to say that our Conservative government continues to stand up for the rights of aboriginal women.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with development assistance budgets withering and the minister turning his back on CIDA's long-standing partners in favour of private corporations, there are many questions about the Minister of International Cooperation's mandate.

Will the new law the government has promised materialize in the form of a specific bill? Will civil society partners and experts be consulted? Will parliamentarians have an opportunity to debate this in depth?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that premise is absolutely ludicrous. Canadian taxpayer money is not a gift. It is used for very reasonable and justifiable purposes.

We are a compassionate country. We are results driven. We are directing Canadian taxpayer dollars where they can have the greatest impact for those most in need.

It is not about shovelling money out the door; it is about ensuring Canadian taxpayer money is used properly and for legitimate reasons.

* * *

[Translation]

1982 REPATRIATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Supreme Court announced that it had completed its review of two judges' violations of the principle of separation of judicial, legislative and executive powers during deliberations to repatriate the Constitution and force it on Quebec.

The Supreme Court said that it found nothing incriminating, but has provided no details about its review. As we have been saying since the beginning, this confirms that only a public inquiry with open access to Privy Council documents can shed light on the matter.

The court's secret inquiry into itself is a parody of justice. When will the government admit that that is not good enough and do the right thing: call for a public inquiry?

● (1500)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court of Canada, is an independent institution that carried out its review and said what it had to say on the matter.

Once again, I would like to reassure Quebeckers and Canadians that we have no intention of reopening old constitutional quarrels. Instead, we plan to focus on our mandate for economic growth and job creation. That is what Quebeckers and Canadians care about.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebeckers have legitimate questions about the Enbridge project, which involves moving oil from the oil sands through the pipeline connecting Ontario to Montreal. The federal government now requires such minimal environmental assessments that they fall far short of responding to concerns.

Citizens, municipalities, environmental groups and the City of Montreal are calling for a real assessment of the project. That is why the Government of Quebec has indicated that it will hold its own environmental consultation.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources commit to abiding by the results of Quebec's environmental analysis rather than acting like a pushy salesperson who works on commission?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government supports the idea of a pipeline to the east that would bring lower cost Canadian crude to consumers and refineries in Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

Our environmental assessment process in this country is world-class. A pipeline to eastern Canada would actually create new jobs, and it would bring economic growth right across this country.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT, NO. 1

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC) for the Minister of Finance moved for leave to introduce Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 9th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled “Main Estimates 2013-14”.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: the 49th report requesting an extension to consider the report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for British Columbia, 2012; the 50th report, requesting an extension to consider the report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Saskatchewan 2012; and the 51st report, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I will move concurrence in the 49th, 50th and 51st reports later this day.

* * *

**NATIONAL HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING
HERITAGE DAY ACT**

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-501, An Act respecting a National Hunting, Trapping and Fishing Heritage Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure and an honour to introduce this bill, an act respecting a national hunting, trapping and fishing heritage day. We know that this is an activity that most Canadians enjoy. It is at the very foundation of our country. Our brothers and sisters of aboriginal nature came to this continent and subsisted by hunting, fishing and trapping. Today, we know that recreational fishing contributes billions of dollars to our economy. More important than that, it is an important social interaction between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. It brings families together to enjoy the great outdoors of this wonderful country of ours.

That is the main reason why I, and my friend who is seconding the bill, are bringing the bill forward. It is important to us, to our constituents and to the country. I look forward to speaking further to the House on the matter.

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

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● (1505)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 49th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier today, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 50th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier today, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House for this motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I will try the last one. If the House gives its consent, I move that the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier today, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent of the House for the motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the Second Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, presented on Tuesday, March 6, 2012, be concurred in.

It is with pleasure that I rise today to express a great deal of concern that Liberals have with regard to the approach of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism in dealing with backlogs and, one could ultimately say, immigration in general. It is fair to say that history might reflect this particular minister as being one of the weaker ministers of citizenship and immigration that we have seen in the last 20 or 30 years.

A report was provided to the House that dealt with the issue of backlogs. I have had the opportunity to see the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism on numerous occasions inside the House, outside the House and inside committees, try to deal with the issue of backlogs. At the very least, one could say that he is somewhat misleading in many of his comments with regard to backlogs, especially when it comes to the creation of them.

Routine Proceedings

I felt it was appropriate to stand today because it was just last week when the minister appeared before the citizenship and immigration committee and provided a report. Part of the report dealt with the issue of backlogs. What struck me as one of the more significant mistakes of the government is the skilled worker backlog. This is an issue that came up last year. It was part of the huge budget backdoor release of numerous pieces of legislation, the Conservative majority-style government saying it has figured out how to get rid of the backlog. What the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism did was present to the House what Liberals would argue was an unfair approach at dealing with the backlog.

Many would suggest that he cut it; I suggest what he really did was hit the delete button. I know the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is a little sensitive on that particular issue, but that is, indeed, the reality of it. There are two issues on which I want to take exception with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism regarding that component of the backlog.

Number one is the idea that it was the Liberal Party that created this huge backlog and the Conservatives have been unable to deal with it in a fair fashion. I agree the Conservatives have not been able to deal with the backlog in a fair fashion, but the creation of the backlog is not true. I do not believe anyone will find a minister of citizenship and immigration in recent history, recent history being the last 30-plus years, who created a backlog to the degree the minister has in one ministerial instruction. Back in 2008, he was the minister, brought in this MI 1 and created a 140,000-plus backlog virtually overnight in one category.

Having created a mess, what did he do? A few years later he talked about wanting to fix the backlog, did not want to take responsibility for his own incompetence and tried to pass off the blame on the former Liberal government, when in fact the responsibility fell on the minister who created the problem. What did he do? He hit the delete button.

Imagine that there are tens of thousands of people around the world who have hopes and dreams, like generations prior, to come to Canada and call Canada their home. They put in their applications to come here under the skilled worker program, many having friends and family throughout our great nation. Sisters, brothers, parents, just name it, are in Canada, providing them advice, telling them to come to Canada because Canada is a wonderful place to be.

● (1510)

Many of those individuals bought into that. They had incredible credentials in their homeland, whether India, the Philippines or any other part of the world, and they put in their applications in good faith. Many would have paid consultants or lawyers to ensure their paperwork was being filled out properly. In most part, they met the criteria. Then they waited. They got in the queue. They submitted their application.

A couple of years go by, and we understand that the demand for immigration to Canada has been increasing quite a bit. At the end of the day, there was a two- to three-year wait period, but no more than that when they had initially put in their application. However, one thing leads to another, and sadly, we have a Conservative Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism who has a totally

different agenda in terms of immigration policy, which at the end of the day adds to this huge backlog by creating an MI 1 ministerial instruction. It was the minister's first attempt, and what a mess it was. As a result of that, these individuals were then put into an even longer backlog.

Fast forward to last year—and this is after we had this report brought forward—and we now have the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism saying that he is going to attempt to clean up his mess, even though he tries to put it on to another political party. It is his mess, and he now wants to clean it up. He decides the best way to do that is to hit the delete button.

Imagine being an individual who, five or six years ago, put in an application and was looking forward to getting processed to come to Canada, but receives in the mail a letter saying, “So sorry; you have been deleted and are no longer able to come to Canada”. Enclosed in this envelope, if one is fortunate enough, one will get a reimbursement of the processing and landing fees. Imagine receiving a letter of that nature.

A few thoughts come to my mind. One could ultimately question it, and there has been a class action suit that is taking place in Ontario on that issue; on the minister's reaction. However, what of those who took the time to pay an immigration consultant, lawyer or agency? This is not a few hundreds dollars, but for many people that would go into the thousands of dollars. Immigration services are not cheap; they cost a great deal of money. For a lot of people, and we are talking thousands of individuals, who would have paid thousands of dollars, none of that money is reimbursed; none at all.

There are those individuals who spent money or changed their lives in anticipation that they would be able to come to Canada. They put their lives on hold in their countries for what I could classify as a deferral of gratification. They were in that on-hold system and possibly prevented from going to other regions of the world. Why? It is because they believed they had an opportunity to come to Canada. In talking to their family and friends, they genuinely felt that would be in the best interest of their children, themselves and their family. They were prepared to wait and make the sacrifices necessary because they believed that Canada was the place to go. We cannot blame them for that. Canada is the best country in the world to live and call home. It is a land of opportunities.

● (1515)

At the end of the day, for tens of thousands of people worldwide, that dream and that hope was taken away by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. He felt it was time to deal with the backlog problem that he created, by hitting the delete button, and I would suggest, in a very cold-hearted fashion.

There is a difference between Conservative immigration policy and Liberal immigration policy. All people need to do is take a look at our leaders, whether it is Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Jean Chrétien or Paul Martin. If we take a look at our immigration planning and programming, it is more holistic and all-encompassing.

We can talk about meeting labour needs. It was the Liberal Party that created the temporary worker program. It was the Liberal Party that created the live-in caregiver program.

Routine Proceedings

The most successful economic program today is the provincial nominee program. We hear a lot about the 338,000 temporary foreign workers who are here today. We understand the degree to which the government has dropped the ball on this issue and has made a mess of this issue.

All we need to do is take a look at the province of Manitoba, and look at the temporary foreign worker numbers in terms of visas going to that province, which has been virtually status quo and has not really changed. On the other hand, Manitoba has used the nominee program to meet the needs of the province. Its immigration numbers have gone from roughly 3,500 annually to well over 10,000 annually.

The need has not increased for the temporary foreign workers, because we recognize the value of immigration. We recognize the contributions that good, sound policy has on our country.

When the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism starts talking about the backlogs, he needs to reflect on some of the mistakes he has made and the results in terms of dreams that have been devastated, the results in regard to the number of individuals on whom he has had a direct impact.

I challenge the minister's Conservative colleagues to start thinking of ways in which we can utilize immigration in a more positive fashion for our country. If we want to try to address the labour needs, for example, what we should be doing and what the Liberal Party has been calling for is to look at ways we can enhance the nominee program.

We see the demand from other provinces continuing to rise, and yet we see Ottawa saying no. One of the ironic things about it is that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism likes to take credit for getting more immigrants every year. Well, if it was not for Jean Chrétien's nominee program, we would not have the numbers we have today. However, I get sidetracked.

If we take a look at that particular program, why not explore the opportunities of other communities and municipalities? We could explore the opportunities that might be there for expanding an economic nominee program.

If the government was to really engage people on that issue, I believe the demand for the temporary foreign worker program would greatly diminish.

The issue with the temporary foreign worker program is that when we were in government, whether it was the Paul Martin government or the Jean Chrétien government, what we saw in the temporary foreign worker program was the Canadian first policy. If there was a Canadian or a landed resident living in Canada who could take on that job, that is what the Liberal governments wanted to happen. That is why they put into place a protocol that ensured that Canadians and landed residents here in Canada, first and foremost, would have the opportunity to get those jobs.

● (1520)

Even when the economy was at its peak and doing its best, we never saw more than 160,000 temporary foreign workers in Canada. Today, we see 338,000 temporary foreign workers. The government is using that particular program to manipulate other factors in our

country, factors like the influence it has on wages, the amount of money individuals are being paid, and taking away jobs from other individuals who would love to be able to work.

What about the government sitting down with the stakeholders who are being affected by some of its policies? Has it sat down with any pilots to hear the concerns they have to raise? Whether it is on the phone from the Toronto airport or sitting down at a McDonald's restaurant in my community or talking to others, pilots are concerned and are saying they are frustrated because they can fly planes yet there are temporary workers who are being brought in. There are other issues that need to be looked at in regard to that. At the very least the government needs to acknowledge that there is something there. It needs to recognize there are many different jobs that are questionable.

I appreciate the apology that came forward from the Royal Bank. It recognized that a mistake was indeed made. The Royal Bank does not have a monopoly in terms of areas where there is the potential for abuse, and I applaud it coming forward and making that apology. However, I do believe there is more to it.

We need to look into that because, at the end of the day, we need to protect the temporary foreign worker program, which has saved industries in Canada. That is why it was brought into being. There are certain industries that are dependent on it, and if they did not have foreign temporary workers, those industries would collapse. If those industries collapsed or if there were jobs that were taken away, the impact of that would be profound on all Canadians, all of us who live in and call Canada our home, because those jobs that were not or could not be filled by those living in Canada contribute to our GDP and our lifestyle.

Therefore, when we talk about the issue of backlogs, maybe it is because the government was not processing those skilled workers in the same fashion as the Liberal administrations before it. In some cases, that could be one of the reasons why we might have more temporary foreign workers in Canada. As I pointed out, there is a multitude of different reasons. That is likely one of them. It is very important that the minister of immigration start really looking at the issue of backlogs from a different perspective.

In bringing forward this report, I was happy to listen to the hours of presentations. There was a lot of discussion on this particular report. We made a number of recommendations at the end of the report. I think we hit the double digits in terms of the number of recommendations. However, in the appendix at the back of the report we did provide a Liberal Party opinion report on it. I can say that, if I had more resources, I probably could have had up to nine pages of report. However, I had to settle for only a couple of pages.

● (1525)

I can assure the House that there is much that could be addressed and that this particular Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is doing a poor job on. Unfortunately, because of limitations of the committee, we were unable to address what I believe were all the important issues that needed to be addressed. Therefore, I would appeal to the committee, on which I am one of the vice-chairs, to start looking at other issues, such as the provincial nominee program and the temporary foreign worker program, and look at ways in which we can take a more holistic approach—

Routine Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The time allotted for the first speech on the motion has expired.

The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for my colleague is fairly straightforward.

Over the last number of years, we have seen changes to our immigration system that have been, to say the least, haphazard, including deleting the backlog, stopping applications from parents and grandparents, and not approving visas for people to visit their families and loved ones for weddings or even for funerals. At the same time, we have seen a huge increase in the temporary foreign worker program. As members know, recently we have heard—and it has been in the media quite a bit—of the egregious abuses in this particular program: even when it was known that Canadians were available to work, temporary foreign workers were brought in.

Now we know that the minister is going to be making some kind of an announcement today, so my question goes back to my colleague: does he believe that this minister has done the kind of consultation that is necessary in order to overhaul this program and make it work in the long run? As well, does he believe that the minister will have solutions to the huge loopholes that his government has facilitated?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I would love to see the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism take responsibility to recognize that it is his lack of leadership that ultimately got us into the problem we have today with the temporary foreign worker program. If the minister were more capable of wanting to address the issue, we would not have 338,000 temporary foreign workers today, and that is the reality of it.

I understand that the minister is now trying to conduct some damage control. We will wait and see what announcements he comes out with in regard to the issue. I will approach it as much as possible with an open mind.

I can tell the minister that I have two primary concerns.

The first is to ensure that Canadian citizens and landed immigrants are being provided the jobs first and foremost. I am interested in how the minister is going to reform the program to ensure that is the case.

My second concern is that he protect the integrity of the temporary foreign worker program, because it is absolutely critical for that program to survive. We need that program in order to ensure the longevity of many of the industries we have here today, because the longevity of those industries provides opportunities for everyone who calls Canada home.

• (1530)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North and I had the opportunity yesterday to visit a gurdwara in Mississauga where concern, almost disgust, was expressed with the current minister's approach to immigration.

Part of that was related to his refusal to allow parents and grandparents into the country. We were told that parents and grandparents are more than a sentimental or emotional addition to their families; they are an economic part of their families as well.

Can my friend from Winnipeg North talk to us about the value of bringing parents and grandparents to this country if we are truly going to be using immigration for nation-building purposes?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I truly appreciate the feedback that I receive from my colleagues. The Liberal caucus and many of my colleagues, in particular the member for Guelph, raise an issue that is brought to all members of the House. It is my privilege to try to explain the situation to the government so that its members recognize what the Liberal Party recognizes and that every member of the Liberal caucus recognizes, which is that what the government doing in regard to the freeze on parents and grandparents is just wrong.

The government needs to realize that it did not have to implement a freeze and that there were alternatives to the freeze. It is about immigration mixture.

In any given year, Canada receives x number of immigrants coming to our country. Canada traditionally has demonstrated compassion in recognizing the importance of the family. When parents come here in their late 40s to their 70s, quite often they are the anchor in the home. They bring stability and provide mentorship and so forth. For many who have small businesses, the grandparents work and sustain the business. They contribute in many different ways, such as in volunteer organizations.

The Liberal Party recognizes that parents have a role to play. It was wrong for the Conservative government to put the freeze in place, and it is something that the Liberal Party continues not to support. It is supposed to be a two-year freeze; I hope and trust that the government is going to take that freeze off, because it is something that the Liberal Party does not support.

If it is still on at the time we take office, if Canadians accept us going into the next election, the freeze will soon be non-existent, because we believe in the family. We believe in a fair immigration policy, and that is what we will strive to achieve.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, it was under a Liberal government that it was taking parents and grandparents seven to eight years for the paperwork to be processed and for them to arrive here. I absolutely agree with my colleague's comments, though, that putting a ban on applications for parents and grandparents is putting terrible pressure on families.

There have been all kinds of reports about the growing issues of mental health among Canadians right across the board. One of the areas is the lack of belonging and lack of connection. As well as the economic arguments, there are also the emotional arguments, which end up being health care costs and economic arguments, because that is more time off work.

With regard to the federal skilled worker program applicants who played by Canadian rules, applied to come here and waited in line, does my colleague believe the government treated them justly?

• (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the backlog for parents and grandparents, it was never seven years during the Liberal administration.

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I was a provincial politician for almost 20 years. Immigration was an important issue for me personally, as it was for the constituents I represented. At times the backlog may have moved closer to four years.

Let there be no doubt that the Liberal Party has consistently argued that parents and grandparents are an absolutely critical component of any mixture of immigrants who come to Canada in any given year. Our party would never support any freeze of that program. As I said, the program brings economic benefit to the country; as well, quite often parents and grandparents are the rock of stability within the family unit, and that is something that cannot be replaced.

My colleague made reference to hitting the delete button and skilled worker program. I had a chance to talk about that issue during my first remarks, but I also want to comment on the visiting visa issue.

Given that someone in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration might be listening to what is happening this afternoon in the House, I want to emphasize that the Liberal Party is quite upset with regard to the number of visiting visas being denied. Siblings, parents and so forth want to come to Canada to participate in such things such as graduations, weddings and funerals. There are all sorts of valuable reasons.

This issue needs to be addressed and must be addressed. We call on the government to look for ways we can deal with that in a more tangible way—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The time for questions and comments has expired.

Resuming debate. The hon. parliamentary secretary for multiculturalism.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak on the subject of immigration, as I myself transitioned in Canada from an international student to a landed immigrant to, finally, a citizen. It has been a pleasure living in this country for the last 45 years.

Our Conservative government's focus remains jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity. Our government is taking concrete action to help unemployed and underemployed Canadians work at their full skill level and to ensure that Canadians and permanent residents are given the first chance at available jobs.

In addition to these efforts, immigration will continue to be a key part of Canada's plan to tackle labour market needs as Canada's workforce continues to age. In order to do that effectively, we could not continue with what was, quite frankly, a dysfunctional immigration system that did not work in Canada's best interests. Our government is committed to moving away from that slow and passive immigration system, with massive backlogs and lengthy wait times, to a proactive just-in-time system that brings economic immigrants to Canada, in a timely fashion, with the skills our economy needs today and will need in the future.

There are countless people across the globe who want to immigrate to Canada. If we look at the latest statistics, there are a total of seven billion people in the world. With extrapolation, we

could understand that more than two billion would like to live in Canada. However, we are mindful of the fact that Canada has the capacity to settle and integrate only a limited number of people each year. That is why the government sets out an annual immigration level plan.

Since 2006, Canada has welcomed the highest sustained level of immigration in Canadian history. However, because the previous dysfunctional immigration system legally required the government to process to completion every application it received, and year after year, the number of applications received was almost double the number of admissions, massive backlogs accumulated in every immigration stream.

Some people, including both opposition parties, have advocated the simplistic option of raising immigration levels to solve this problem. They are wrong. Even raising immigration levels to 1%, which is the official policy of both the NDP and the Liberals, would have only a limited impact, and massive backlogs and long wait times would persist.

I would also point out that raising levels is out of step with the views of Canadians, including immigrants, who do not support significant increases in immigration levels. It is not because of anti-immigration sentiment, as immigrants are just as likely to hold these views as those born in Canada. It is because of practicality. People understand that there is limited capacity and funds to integrate newcomers.

The only way to actually prevent massive immigration backlogs and skyrocketing wait times is to align the number of applications with the number of admissions. Some would say, "So what if people have to wait?"

The fact is that immigration backlogs have had real and negative consequences for immigrants and for the Canadian economy. Immigrants had to put their lives on hold while they waited years for an answer. Due to outdated selection criteria, too many of them had to wait to come to Canada, only to face unemployment or underemployment. For Canadians and the Canadian economy, it meant lost productivity and acute skills shortages that were still not being filled. It also meant that Canada was losing the global competition to attract and retain the best and brightest talent from across the globe.

As we can clearly see, Canada's previous immigration system made no sense. After years of neglect from previous governments and ministers of immigration who were too afraid to make the necessary reforms, our Conservative government acted. We are aggressively pursuing transformational change to Canada's immigration system, moving toward an immigration system that functions in the best interests of Canada's economy and also of immigrants.

As a result of these long overdue reforms, I was very proud to announce just a few weeks ago that the total immigration backlog has seen a dramatic reduction of 40%. This is major progress. It is important to understand where we were and where we were headed, compared to how far we have come as a result of the transformational changes we continue to implement.

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I will give some examples. The federal skilled worker program is Canada's flagship economic immigration system. More economic immigrants came through this system than through any other system. Under the old system, by 2008, approximately 640,000 applications had accumulated in the backlog. Applicants were waiting six years for a decision. The backlog was projected to balloon to over 1.5 million, with wait times of 15 years by 2015.

• (1540)

Canada competes for the top talent in a globalized world. Many of our peer countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, are mindful of this and have fast and flexible immigration systems that process applications within a matter of months. You can imagine that if given the option of waiting a decade in a queue or obtaining permanent residency in a matter of months that any rational person would choose the latter. Canada was losing the competition for the best and brightest talent from around the world. To resolve this major issue, the government took the difficult but necessary step of eliminating most of the old applications in the federal skilled worker backlog.

It is very telling that this Liberal member would claim to be outraged at the idea of eliminating old federal skilled worker applications. I say that because the Liberals tried to do the exact same thing in 2003, when they were in government, but they failed, because the court ruled against their efforts. The difference is that where they were incompetent and failed, our government was successful and competent. What is even more disturbing about the hypocrisy is that the Liberal immigration critic is not aware of his own party's record on immigration. I think that is a serious cause for concern.

In addition, we temporarily paused the federal skilled worker program while we improved the outdated points system. For too long, too many immigrants were coming through the federal skilled worker program only to face unemployment or underemployment. We pored through a large volume of research, which consistently showed that language proficiency, youth and pre-arranged job offers were the most important factors associated with the economic success of immigrants.

On May 4, we will open the new FSW program with an updated points system and a requirement to have one's overseas education assessed before applying so that one has a realistic understanding of how it compares to the Canadian standard. It is what I like to call truth in advertising.

As a result of these actions, along with other important steps we have taken, beginning in 2008 with the introduction of ministerial instructions, we are well on our way to a federal skilled worker program that functions on a just-in-time basis. Today we have gone from a backlog of 640,000 to only 90,000 and from a wait time of six years headed toward 15 years to a wait time of only one year.

The backlog reduction in the federal skilled worker program clears the way for the move toward an innovative system based on what we call an expression of interest. Applicants will eventually go into a large pool of qualified immigration applicants for Canada, giving us their consent to share their applications with employers, and indeed, with provincial governments, so that those employers can come into the pool of qualified immigrant applicants and do their international labour recruitment from within that pool.

For example, if Canadian engineers start retiring in large numbers as the baby boomers retire, and an engineering firm will need 10 additional engineers next year and will be looking for engineers within a particular specialized area, it would be able to go into the system and do a query to look for the qualified prospective immigrants in that field in that pool. It would be able to look at their applications and their pre-assessed education and credentials. If it was satisfied and wanted to do its due diligence, the firm would offer that person a job. The government would then bring in that immigrant applicant on a lightning-speed basis.

We did some very interesting research that showed that immigrants who arrive with pre-arranged jobs in Canada are earning almost \$80,000 in income after their third year, which is much higher than the average. This is where we want to head.

Coming with a pre-arranged job means that people get past the survival job gap and go straight into employment at their skill level. They are making good money and are paying taxes so that we can provide health care and our social programs. That is why we need a fast, flexible system. That is why we must deal decisively with these backlogs.

I am very proud of the progress we have made, thanks to the decisive action we have taken.

There is more good news. The federal skilled worker program is not the only immigration stream that has seen major progress. The second is for parents and grandparents. In addition to addressing labour market needs, Canada's immigration system also facilitates family re-unification. Over the years, the parent and grandparent program experienced a growing number of applications to the point where the backlog grew to over 160,000 applications and a wait time of eight years. I think we can all agree that this was unfair to applicants and their families.

What actions have we taken? This is the reason we have introduced the action plan for faster family re-unification. By admitting the highest number of parents and grandparents in 20 years over 2012 and 2013, while placing a temporary pause on the program, we have seen a dramatic reduction of 50% in the backlog.

In addition, the new super visa allows parents and grandparents, many who do not want permanent residence but want to spend an extended period of time with their children and grandchildren, to visit Canada for two years at a time over a 10-year period. Over 1,000 super visas are issued every month. The approval rate is high at over 85%. In fact, had we not acted in 2011, the wait times would have grown to 250,000, with a 15-year wait time, by 2015.

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•(1545)

However, the opposition parties have opposed improvements to the parent and grandparent program. Both the NDP and the Liberals have committed to returning to the pre-2011 program.

We need to avoid going back to the old system of ballooning backlogs and skyrocketing wait times. We have spent the last year consulting with Canadians on a new parent and grandparent program, which will be unveiled later this year. It is important that the new program be sustainable, and most importantly, that it avoids backlogs in the future.

The options could not be clearer: people can wait 15 years to be reunited with parents or wait two years or less. The parties advocating for unlimited applications are not supporting family reunification. Exactly the opposite is true. Lengthy wait times keep families apart.

There has also been significant progress in reducing the backlog in business class. The backlog had increased to over 100,000, with a wait time of almost a decade. It would have grown to over 250,000, with an astonishing 20-year wait time, by 2015.

By pausing applications for the investor and entrepreneur programs, we have managed to reduce the backlogs and the wait times slightly. While the program remains paused, we are working on a new program that will move from a passive program with no actual long-term investment to a program that reflects demand and requires active investment and job creation in Canada.

There are obviously more streams where progress has been made and some in which progress has not been made. However, the pattern is the same. In programs where we have taken action to better align the number of applications with the number of admissions, backlogs have gone down, and wait times have decreased.

In conclusion, to maintain Canada's tradition of openness and generosity, we must ensure that our immigration system functions so as to best support our national interests and our country's long-term economic prosperity. That is why our government has initiated a series of transformational changes that enhance Canada's economic immigration system and allow us to keep pace with our country's evolving needs.

Our new and improved immigration system would help ensure Canada's long-term economic prosperity by allowing us to select the skilled immigrants our country needs and the ones who are the most likely to succeed when they get here. This would ensure that newcomers are able to contribute their full potential, help alleviate labour shortages and grow Canada's economy.

Our ultimate goal is a just-in-time immigration system that recruits people with the right skills to meet Canada's labour market needs, fast-tracks their applications and gets them working in a period of months, not years. To get there, we have taken clear and decisive action to dramatically reduce backlogs. However, we still have work to do in that area as we strive to attain our goal of having a fast and nimble immigration system.

We want to bring highly skilled newcomers into the Canadian workforce more quickly so that they can help fuel our economic growth and fully contribute to our nation's productivity. We have

made tremendous progress toward this goal over the past year, and we will continue to build our achievements in the months and years to come.

•(1550)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize my colleague across the way. He sits on the committee with me. I know he cares passionately about this file.

I have a question for him. I know that in my specific riding, it feels more like a hospital emergency room. Many days I feel that all we are doing is triage. We hear so many concerns from constituents who are upset, fed up, frustrated and angry about the long wait for a spouse to come from another country or about waiting six to eight years for parents or grandparents.

Also people come into my office asking if they can have a letter. I am always shocked, because they want a letter because a parent has died and the siblings having been denied a visa to come to the funeral.

Does my colleague across the way deal with cases like that in his riding? If so, what kind of response is he able to give them?

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the member opposite is also passionate about the whole issue of immigration.

With respect to her first question on spousal re-unification, I think that is one of the fastest streams that exists in our system. I get those questions in my riding from time to time. Usually they are resolved in the most expeditious manner.

Regarding parents and grandparents, as I indicated previously, there is a large backlog. However, having put the super visa on stream, one can apply for a super visa and come for a two-year period of stay. It is a visa issued for a period of ten years.

With respect to federal skilled workers, in the past they had to be in a sequential file. Now they go into a pool and can be drawn by ten different provinces and three different territories.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend talked about cutting the backlog by 40%, but one of the methods used was to simply go back to the federal skilled worker program, as the member for Winnipeg North spoke about earlier, and simply delete hundreds of thousands of applicants who applied before February 2008 and make it appear that the government had adequately and properly dealt with the issue when in fact it had not. The way to deal with backlogs is to apply the proper human resources that can process those applications.

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My question is about family reunification and bringing parents and grandparents here. I do not want to commit sociology, as the Prime Minister would put it, something for which I am sure the Minister of Public Safety would love to introduce a minimum sentence, but family reunification is a lot more than just bringing parents and grandparents to Canada for sentimental or emotional reasons. Parents and grandparents form part of the economic unit of a family as well, either working at businesses or staying at home and taking care of children that parents might not otherwise have the resources to pay for such services.

Again, why the freeze? So many people on a daily basis come into my constituency office, and I am sure other constituency offices, saying that they want their parents and grandparents here. Why will the Conservatives not apply the proper human resources to process those applications instead of now starting to change the rules to make it convenient for the government?

•(1555)

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his concern about family reunification. In many cultures family reunification is a key aspect of family life and the building blocks for an economy. As the grandparents are older, they look after the grandchildren. They also help to perpetuate the system of respect for one's elders by having parents live within the same household. This is certainly the case for many of the cultures of East and South Asia.

How we address this family reunification system is, as we have indicated, that because the backlog is so long in applying for permanent residency for parents or grandparents, it would be much simpler to issue them a 10-year visa for as long as their passports are valid, for which they could stay two years. That would be quite sufficient to serve the need for faster reunification. As I mentioned, there is a 85% approval rate on this file.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I sit on the same committee as the member and he is familiar with the backlogs. One of the references I often make is to the ministerial instructions, and that is the current minister's first attempt to deal with the backlog. When he brought that forward in 2008, in essence it created 140,000 additional brand new files, thereby increasing that backlog likely, many would argue, more quickly than any other minister before him.

Will the member acknowledge that the minister did increase the skilled worker backlog by 140,000? It is not a trap question, it is more of a question of accepting responsibility more than anything else. After all, it is in the report itself. Would the member acknowledge that fact?

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite asked a good question. I applaud his commitment and enthusiasm for this file.

Let me be the first to state that the minister is one of the most responsible ministers that we have in the House. By deleting the federal skilled worker issue, he will be giving immigrants some hope that they will not have to wait in a queue for seven or more years. The minister will be allowing them to put their credentials and equivalency into a pool from which Canadian employers can draw.

Instead of sequentially picking an immigrant from maybe 240,000 applications, employers can choose from a pool of qualified

immigrants. Employers will have 10 provincial and 3 territorial sources to go to. I assure the member that this will put our immigration system in a just-in-time selection process where immigrants can be processed within a year.

•(1600)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the last number of months, after speaking with embassies overseas about the interview process, it sounds like the process has been contracted out to agencies other than being done by embassy staff who represent Canada. There are problems with delays and with things being disconnected. Has the government headed in that direction? Is that part of the reason why we are having some trouble getting information on various files? Has that interview process been contracted out to other agencies?

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, certain aspects of these interviews are contracted out, especially when we have indicated that we need to test English or French. That is done by third party sources that are probably much better at doing it. There are certain cases where actual immigration staff may not totally understand the equivalences and professional skills, whether it be medicine, architecture or engineering. Some of those may be reviewed by professionals who have been accredited to us to do the work.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the report being debated, the NDP has a supplemental report attached to it and I would urge all members to read it.

It comes as no surprise to anybody that Canada is a nation of immigrants. Outside of first nations communities, we are all immigrants. The children and grandchildren are further descendants of people who came to Canada to make this land their new home. Our forefathers and foremothers were given a chance to start a new life here, to grow and succeed. In this endeavour, we have all been helped, every one of us in the House.

We think that Canadians, even today, believe that Canada's immigration policies need to be nation-building policies, not policies of division and fear, not policies of uncertainty where we treat people in a shabby manner. To that extent, I want to talk about the kind of image that gets projected overseas when we make changes, which the government has done. By the way, my colleagues sitting in that corner are not absolutely clear of blame for the direction a lot of these policies have taken because the backlogs started growing under their watch.

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Because of the kinds of changes that were made without due diligence, without consultation with Canadians right across the country and without thinking about how all the different pieces fit together, we have ended up with a lot of uncertainty in our immigration system. People outside of Canada going to our website are never sure if things are going to change today or tomorrow or things that they are promised today may be taken away tomorrow or the day after. At the same time, the government has made piecemeal changes to this file that are not coherent and do not make up a multifaceted and enriching experience for new people coming to our country. The government needs to acknowledge that it has messed up this file in a really bad way.

First, let us take a look at our international reputation that has been damaged. Someone hit the delete button on 267,000 files of skilled workers who applied according to Canadian-made rules. They played by our rules. They applied, were qualified and were told to wait in line until their turn came. Then came the year 2012 and the minister had an idea that the backlogs were too long and we had to look at how to reduce them. There is a multitude of ways to reduce backlogs. We have suggested some and shared ideas. Instead, the minister chose one, which was to hit the delete button and told the applicants that the government would return their fees that were paid for five to 10 years ago.

Yes, we gave their fees back, but what kind of reputation did we earn as a country that could not be trusted to live up to its word? What happened to the dreams and aspirations of all the skilled workers, who we recognized as skilled workers and the contributions they would have made to our country, as well as the damage that was done to their families' dreams and aspirations?

Whenever the minister says that the government has reduced the backlog, I always want to tell him that it is easy to reduce the backlog if he keeps hitting the delete button. The other way it is easy to reduce the backlog is to tell people that for two years they cannot apply to bring their parents or grandparents to Canada.

• (1605)

It is really hard for me to explain to people in different communities across Canada why the party sitting across there in government often talks about family values and the importance of family. What I hear from new immigrants, the ones who have taken up our citizenship—and it is heartbreaking when they ask me this question—is “If families are so important, whose family is important? Is my family not important?”

I could stand for hours talking about the economic and social gains to be made with family reunification, when families can be united with parents and grandparents. I could tell the House stories of how much I learned from my grandparents and what a critical role they played in my life.

There are also economic gains. For many people, they could go out to work with a lot more comfort knowing that their children are at home being looked after by a family member. By the way, this is not a government that has provided for universal child care. In many ways there are huge vacuums in our communities right across Canada. It is very difficult.

In many communities across this country, parents feel more comfortable leaving their children with family members, with grandparents. Those families would be far more productive at work, and absences from work and mental illness issues would all be reduced. That would be a huge savings to our health care system as well.

The other area of backlogs that we have to talk about very seriously is when people get married to someone overseas. My riding of Newton—North Delta is one of the most diverse ridings going. I am sure many MPs say that. I have people come in and tell me that they were married three years ago and now have a two-year-old, and have even had DNA tests done to prove that they are the dad or mom and, still, they are waiting.

Those issues have to be addressed. It seems that certain CIC centres around the globe take an inordinately long period. We are talking about family reunification, parents and grandparents, yes, but when we are talking about spouses being kept apart from newborn infants, I think we must all acknowledge that is a huge problem in our society. We all know the importance of the family unit, the importance of newborns being with a mother and a father, growing up in that family unit.

When we are talking about our reputation overseas, let us take a look at how the minister has managed the refugee file and the cuts to health care. Right now people are waiting for their loved ones, to be reunited here. The government has created so-called safe countries, is putting so much power in the hands of the minister and is creating a two-tiered refugee system. All of that sends out shock waves, and people are asking if it is really safe.

We have that leaked document that indicated that the UN was even wondering if it was really safe to send people to Canada if they do not even get basic health care, wondering if it wanted to take that kind of a chance. There are some huge issues that have been created.

Every time we turn around, there are more financial barriers. Every time I ask about family reunification for parents and grandparents, we are always told about the super visa. Well, the super visa does not apply to young siblings. It only applies to parents and grandparents.

Touted over and over again is what a huge success the super visa has been. Many people do not even qualify, because the economic requirements for the super visa are high, and even if parents are only coming to visit for a month, they have to have medical insurance for a whole year. It is private insurance. Buying medical insurance for a whole year, for many new young families, is a huge financial burden.

• (1610)

If one is only coming for a month, why would one not get medical insurance for a month? Often, it is young families who are struggling, knowing they cannot apply for their parents and grandparents but at least get to be with them for a month, who would now have to put that huge sum of money upfront for a year even though they are only coming for a month. That seems bizarre to me.

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Let me make it clear that even though they buy insurance for a year, if the parents only come and stay for a month, they still have an 11-month credit. However, that kind of credit only works for people who have a little money in their back pocket. Not everybody in my riding has the luxury of being able to put out the huge sum of money that is required for medical insurance.

Also, there are many people who are almost put off from applying for a super visa—and I am speaking from experience in talking to people—when I tell them how much the medical insurance is. By the time they factor in the cost of it, they sit in my office and cry. I have heard this from other MPs as well, who tell me this is a barrier.

We are not saying that the super visa is a bad thing. We absolutely think there is a place for a super visa, but it does not replace family reunification. Someone can visit for a week, a month or two months, but that does not replace a family unit living together and supporting each other.

To get back to the federal skilled workers program, we got rid of the backlog by deleting. For the family reunification, we just did not let people apply. However, there were other options available to the government, but the Conservatives did not use those options. They used some draconian measures so that publicly they could say they had reduced.

Well, if the Conservatives stop applications to the investment class, freeze applications to the federal skilled workers program, hit the delete button, have horrendous delays in spousal reunification, do not allow parents and grandparents to apply, of course they can say the backlog has gone down. However, when the two years are up for those parents and grandparents, are they going to forget that they want to be with their families or are they going to apply? What has the Conservative government arranged in the way of resources to address the increase in applications it will face in two years' time?

There is fear in the communities for those who have been waiting for two years to apply and have the application filled out and ready to hand in. Just as the government hit the delete button, it might have plans it has not shared with parliamentarians about this program as well. I urge my colleagues across the way to remember that they say family is important. If family is important for them, then family has to be important for all Canadians and all the people who live here.

We often talk about the importance of family and other kinds of wait lists. I hear from many MP offices on this, and believe it or not, I even hear from some of my Conservative colleagues, but one of the things that is driving many MP offices is when temporary resident visas are turned down. We are not saying that no visa applicant should ever be turned down. We have to do our due diligence. However, in cases of people who have been to Canada before, are leaving their son and daughter in a private school in India, and their husband and their parents, but they want to come here for their niece's wedding, the comment they get is: "not a good enough reason to visit". Let me say that nothing would keep me from attending the wedding of my nephews and nieces.

●(1615)

Yet, I have to listen to constituents, in my office, who are absolutely heartbroken because they cannot attend or they cannot

bring even one family member over to attend some of those functions.

I have thousands of those kinds of examples.

Just last week, a woman in my riding passed away. The family applied for a visa, in India, for one of her daughters who lives in India to be allowed to come here to the funeral and was rejected. Then they came to my office and said, "We never thought we would get rejected for a daughter to attend her mother's funeral".

We have to look at the kind of image we are sending out. Canada is a beautiful country. I have chosen to make it my home and I am very proud of my country.

However, these kinds of things are happening. It gives me grave concern for the future. Our backlogs do have to be addressed. However, let us address them in a real way instead of doing cosmetic PR stunts just to say we have done it, but in the process we are harming a lot of innocent people, without paying due attention to the kind of impact it has upon them.

One of the other issues I want to talk about, and I know it will be in the announcement we are going to hear today, is the increasing financial barriers. Sometimes the sums of money for different fees may not seem huge to us. For example, if people apply for a temporary resident visa and get rejected, there is no appeal. All they get is this form, and often it tells them very little. Then they have to reapply and pay the fee all over again. When I look at the increasing fees we are charging people who want to come to this country or who want to bring their family members here, then I really think we have to ensure we are not putting unnecessary financial barriers in the way.

The immigration file is a huge file. It is absolutely the cornerstone of who we are as Canadians. I appeal to my colleagues across the way. Instead of making this up as we go along, putting a little plug here, a little plug there, hitting a delete button here, shutting the door there, I think it is time to absolutely take the necessary action where abuse is happening, as in the temporary foreign worker program. However, then let us take the time, through parliamentary debate and discussions with Canadians right across Canada, to come up with a system that would truly reflect who we are as a nation.

The temporary foreign worker story is not new. I know that since I have been a critic for this area, I have been raising it in this House on a regular basis, yet it took two key stories, the HD Mining and the RBC story, to draw Canadians' attention to it. What it showed is that we have a temporary foreign worker program—and by the way, let me make it very clear that the NDP supports a program that addresses genuine and legitimate labour shortage needs for Canada, and there are different ways to address those labour shortage needs; we support a temporary foreign worker program that responds to those temporary needs while we grow our own talent; and we support that temporary need that occurs where there is a severe shortage in a particular sector.

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However, what we do not support is the kind of manipulation that we have seen of the temporary foreign worker program. We are hearing that instead of LMOs, many ALMOs are being given, which were only really meant for highly skilled workers, and they are being given without due oversight and due diligence.

So, instead of actually spending time looking for Canadian workers, very quickly, instead of going for an LMO, they go for an ALMO, and bingo.

• (1620)

Then the government, by saying it is going to pay 15% less, is basically accommodating a race to the bottom. It has an impact by suppressing salaries for Canadians, but it also gives less pay to those who are coming to do the same work.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my grandparents came to Canada a little over 100 years ago. Had the current rules applied, my grandparents would not have been able to come to Canada. I would not be here speaking in the House today. I would be on the hills in a southern province of Italy, probably tending sheep as my grandfather did many years ago. That probably applies for many of us in the House whose grandparents came from other countries.

My friend from Willowdale in his earlier speech used the words “just in time”. He used them as a wonderful cliché that is usually applied in the manufacturing industry. They get the part there just in time. By doing that we are making our immigrants a mere commodity and ignoring the value of family reunification, with parents and grandparents coming, not just for sentimental reasons, but as part of the economic family unit.

Could my friend talk about any concerns she might have about the commodification of immigrants, whether that should really apply and whether or not it aborts our whole idea of nation building, which includes parents and grandparents?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the story he tells of how his family got here. I agree with him that if we were to look on either side of the House, many of us have those stories.

I arrived in Canada in 1975 to the beautiful province of Quebec, when there was a shortage of English teachers in Quebec. They came to England and my husband and I both happened to be English teachers, so we came to Canada that way. When we came to Canada we fell in love with it and decided to make it our home. A home is where we can have our families with us. If we cannot have our families with us, we are just guests.

Recently, what I have heard more and more is about getting cheap labour in, brought in for two years to do the work, at less pay, then shipped out and another batch of temporary foreign workers brought in. Those are the conversations I have heard. We let them do the work and let them go away. That is not how we build a nation. That is not how we build our communities. That is not the Canada I love.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want my colleague to share her opinion on a rather important issue so that she can shed some light on the contradictions in the government's talking points.

On one hand, the government is saying that there are long wait times, that the immigration system is in critical need of reform and that new programs need to be created because the current system is not working. On the other hand, the government is cutting aid to immigrants and shutting down embassies like the office in Buffalo, for example. There are some real contradictions there.

The parliamentary secretary just said that the system needs to be reformed because wait times are too long. However, another parliamentary secretary will say that, unfortunately, we need to find cost savings and that the only option is to cut resources.

Could my colleague comment on these contradictions?

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question because I know that in Quebec, specifically in the Montreal area, they have experienced these contradictions that are having a real impact on communities. We have a government that keeps saying it is reducing backlogs and doing wonderful things in immigration, but it has actually closed more centres than any other government. It has also reduced, so that in many cases, for example, the files out of Buffalo, some of the boxes remained unopened. Some people's medicals ran out and they were left sitting in limbo not even knowing where their files were.

We hear that around the world the CIC centres are experiencing more and more pressure because of the workload. Here in Canada with the closures on Vancouver Island, it has meant that the Vancouver office is inundated. That is happening right across this country.

In northern Ontario, people now have to travel for days, hours and hours and by the way, it is days when we think about flights, yet the government keeps saying it is fixing things. I believe the government has no interest in fixing the problems in immigration. What it has an interest in is divisive politics and pitching communities against each other and making cosmetic moves in order to get hits in the media.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from what my colleague has said in the House today, what she is really saying is that the government has done such a fabulous job of managing the economy, that everyone wants to come to Canada. It is true. People around the world want to come to Canada because they see it as a country that is prospering under this government. We have done an amazing job managing the economy. What the member is also saying is that there should be free everything for everybody who wants to come into the country.

Routine Proceedings

I wonder what part of due diligence the member sees as the responsibility of the government to ensure first of all, that we are able to manage our economy, to manage the services for Canadians who are here and yet still have the warm and open arms that we have to so many people who do come to Canada. We want to see families reunited. We are providing those services for people around the world to come to Canada, but there are proper processes that people need to go through. I wonder if the member could comment on due diligence that is the responsibility of the government to provide.

• (1630)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the government absolutely has the responsibility for due diligence and at no time have we said everyone should come here for free, let us open the doors and let everyone in. That is the kind of exaggeration that undermines the serious debate we are having here today.

We are talking about family reunification. Family reunification is an economic benefit. There is all kinds of evidence for that. This is a nation that has been built by immigrants. Our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents came to this country. What really upsets me is the idea that no matter what barriers we put up, what kind of doors we have shut, delete buttons we have hit, there is this delusional image that somehow we are doing some great things. That is what the government has. I want the government to meet some of the people I meet with, who tell me that this does not feel like their Canada any more. That is the voice of many new people who have arrived in this country.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to add my voice to that of the member for Newton—North Delta in saying that, contrary to some of the examples the parliamentary secretary brought up a moment ago, we are seeing repeatedly quite arbitrary, rapid decisions to deny family members the opportunity to come to Canada for weddings, for funerals, for key family events. It defies any logic.

These people in their applications asking for family members to visit have made it clear that family members have jobs in their home country, have other family and have no intention of staying in Canada. They merely want to come to Canada for a visit to see their relatives. I do not understand the heartlessness behind these decisions.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: I agree, Mr. Speaker, it is heartless. As a member of Parliament sitting in one of the most august bodies in this country, I am heartbroken when I listen to my constituents' stories and the government tells us the number of temporary resident visas that are being denied. It is just not nice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, 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 Cape Breton—Canso, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada; the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Employment Insurance; and the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskas- ing, Food Safety.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this issue today because

there has been a huge increase in the number of people in my riding of Vancouver Centre seeking to make their way through this massive backlog and these terrible rules. There are now four times the number of people in my riding in this situation. People are coming from other ridings because representatives elsewhere do not want to meet with them, discuss the issues or help them. My riding is the catch-all, so I can personally talk about the number of people suffering as a result of some of these problems.

We have heard everyone in the House talk about visitor visas. Many people come here to visit their families, and they are usually parents or grandparents. They want to come in a hurry, because quite often they are coming to help with births. Perhaps their daughter is giving birth and they need to be there with her, or they are coming for a funeral or to be with someone who is critically ill and may or may not survive. In order for them to get here on time for some of these things, the process has to be quick.

Constituents come begging and pleading, asking what we can do to help them. Some people have finally been able to come long after the person has died or long after the birth of a child. For things like funerals, weddings, et cetera, there is a problem. All of us have families. Most of us belong to some kind of family group, and we know of the importance and relevance of these kinds of events in our lives.

Often when young couples come here, they are separated from their families and are in a strange new country. For daughters giving birth to a child or going through the last part of a pregnancy, having their mothers or grandmothers with them is extremely important. Families being able to get here in time helps young people psychologically. We know that the ability of people to survive illnesses or other kinds of events depends on being comfortable and knowing they have someone to support them. We know how important it is for young moms to have family present at the births of their babies, as they are scared and do not have a clue about what is happening and need both cultural and physical support to be there.

This is a problem. It is a problem that used to exist many years ago. Everyone knew that the backlog was increasing and that it was taking longer and longer to deal with visas, but quite often a minister would intervene when he or she noticed that people needed to come here quickly because of a death, a serious illness, the imminent birth of a child or something else that could not be postponed. The minister would often give that kind of ministerial okay. In many instances, the ability to get a visitor's visa was cleared up because we had ministers who had a hands-on approach and did not listen only to their own parties.

Everyone in the House knows that they have come to ministers before, and I am not speaking only of the last Liberal government but of the government of Prime Minister Mulroney before that. There was an ability to understand the human condition.

The current government is quick to intervene if it thinks there is a problem, but it jumps in feet first. It does not look at what the outcomes would be or the unintended consequences. It just jumps in and does a quick fix. We have seen that happen before.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to the backlog, the minister issued his ministerial instructions, one, two and three, and it made everything worse. If we look, for instance, at the skilled worker program, there is a backlog because the minister intervened with some brilliant initiative, or one that was considered to be brilliant. There are now 140,000 more people in the backlog.

The answer, of course, to quickly fix a problem that was not well thought out in the first place is to then do a chop and get rid of it. The idea was to do a quick fix, a silver bullet.

However, the silver bullet only made matters worse. If there are 140,000 skilled workers in the backlog, what is the answer? The answer is to get rid of the backlog by telling people they cannot come—just eliminate it, make it disappear.

• (1635)

It reminds of playing peek-a-boo with little kids. They think that because they cannot see me, I cannot see them. They have the ability to pretend that something will go away if they do not notice it too much or if they pretend it is not there; it will automatically go away because the minister waves a magic wand.

This is the kind of thing we are seeing. It is not only in skilled worker programs that we are seeing backlogs. It is not happening only in the backlogs of getting, in a timely manner, visitor's visas to come for important family occasions. I am not talking about coming for a holiday, but about important family occasions, although a visitor's visa to come for a holiday, spend some time with family and spend some money in the country is a good thing. However, we have seen our tourism rates dropping remarkably because people cannot get here and spend money in the economy and do things. As a nation like Canada, we need to have tourists come in. That is another story, and we will not get into that one.

I wanted to talk about this quick fix that has caused some of the problems we are talking about today.

We have a minister who decides that he has all the answers, jumps on them and does not consult with anyone. When I say "consult", I do not just mean consulting with the people he knows and with people who support his initiatives in the first place. Consulting broadly with Canadians is a time-honoured thing that immigration ministers used to do. They would actually go and sit down, shut up and listen to what people were telling them. They would listen to some creative ideas about resolving some of the problems we face with immigration backlogs and other problems such as foreign skilled workers, temporary foreign workers, et cetera. They would listen and try to make the situation better, because sometimes provinces and local communities on the ground had answers. People had ways of finding answers to some of the problems.

That does not happen anymore.

The minister knows what to do. The minister always knows what to do, but we have a problem with the minister who, to prevent a backlog, created an even bigger backlog, and then, to ensure it would go away, just said he did not want these people in the backlog anymore. In other words, if he put his hands over his eyes and said no, everything would disappear.

We have seen that time and again. We have seen it with the temporary foreign worker program. That program existed for a very long time, and it was there in order to do two things.

One was to find a worker when we could not find a Canadian with the skills, ability or knowledge to fill that job. That was when we got in a temporary foreign worker. Otherwise, it was for jobs that Canadians did not want to do, for whatever reasons.

As a result, there was a temporary foreign worker program that brought in people to fill these jobs, and they filled them, but those workers also had the ability to stay. It was found that after a while, the temporary foreign workers were coming here back and forth, either for seasonal programs in the agricultural sector or in other sectors. In Vancouver, for example, in the construction sector in 2010 when we were trying to develop a new system of rapid transit between our Vancouver airport into downtown, we had people coming from Costa Rica and other places because they were able to do the work. We did not even have the ability to use the machinery, and they were able to do so.

In other words, we need people to come. That is a good thing. Let us make that happen.

Let us make it happen on a level playing field, though. I heard the minister say today, in an answer in question period, that it would be 15% and no more. Fifteen per cent is a massive amount of money. However, we saw in Vancouver, during the building of our rapid transit for 2010, that people were being paid half the amount of other people, even though they had the same skills.

We have a government that turns a blind eye. It watches a program that has worked for a long time; then it decides it wants to find a better way to fill the skilled labour shortage because of the backlog and the fact that it had not done any of the work needed to get skilled workers to come into this country to work at the jobs they are trained to do. It was a massive loss of skilled workers that we could have had. We all know of the doctors driving taxis and the neurosurgeon who is using a backhoe somewhere, trying to help somebody do construction work.

The current minister is not looking at what other governments have done. It is interesting that governments have tended to build on good things that other governments have done. They built on them and created something new, but they did not demolish; the current government seeks to demolish anything that was put in place before it came to power.

Routine Proceedings

●(1640)

The minister decided he wanted a lot of temporary workers. The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development met with businesses and said if they wanted to get people in, they could go up to 15% lower in the rate and they did not even have to give the government reasons, as they used to be required to do. People used to have to show that a Canadian could not fill the job. People used to have to show that they had sent out applications, that they had advertised a job and that either they could not find somebody with the skills or they could not find anybody who wanted to take the job. That was when the temporary foreign skilled workers came in.

What we have now is that the both the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and the Minister of Immigration intervened, and they created a mess. Now we have temporary foreign workers coming in because businesses can pay them less, and they are taking Canadian jobs that Canadians had the skills to do and wanted to do.

Just as we see the minister caused a problem with the backlog of 140,000 in the skilled worker program and then pretended that the only way to get rid of it was to cancel it with a pen on a piece of paper, now we have a government that created the problem with the temporary foreign workers. It made a huge mess of it, and when people began to scream and yell, it suddenly arrived like a knight in shining armour and pretended to fix the problem it had caused.

If I were not so despairing of some of the things that go on with the government, I would find it amusing, because it is so incompetent. It is such an example of profound incompetence, a sense of "I know what I am doing" and of omnipotence when the government goes ahead, causes a problem, and then, when the problem hits it in the face, pretends that it has just solved the problem by going back to what used to be.

We heard about the temporary foreign worker program, which is what it used to be based on. Who changed it? The Conservative government changed it. Now it is going back to what worked. It seems like such a waste of time. It is not just a waste of time, it is a waste of human resources and of people who try to come to this country. These people are bent on a hope that they can get a job and that if they come and work three years as a temporary foreign worker, they will learn the language, they will learn some skills and learn about how the workplace in Canada works. Then, they can apply to become an immigrant in this country. They can apply to become a landed immigrant and to be able to bring their families and to build a nation.

We only talk about workers. The government has taken the whole immigration program and turned it into a workforce only program. When we look at the grandparents and the parents who are now waiting two years before they can come to this country to be with their families, family reunification is a huge part of building a family and building a nation.

It used to be that we saw immigration, and even refugees, as people who came to this country looking for the kinds of things that we were proud that Canada had to offer, such as economic opportunity and the ability to escape some sort of aggression or discrimination in the home country. Canada even went above and

beyond the United Nations' refugee rules and set up its own rules to bring in women who were at risk of discrimination in their own countries and to bring in people who were refugees that did not meet the usual categories, because we understood their need to come to this country and build a new life.

It is interesting. As many of us came to this country as immigrants, as soon as we came to Canada, we put our roots down, we began to have families, we began to bring our parents and grandparents and we began to build our extended families who were born here and which most of us enjoy. Immigrants need that extended family.

We decided to put down roots, and when we put down roots, what we do is suddenly have a stake in Canada. What is good for Canada is good for us and our families and what is good for us and our families is good for Canada. Suddenly, we start working together to build a better country and a better nation.

This is what immigration used to be about. We now see that it is not about that anymore. Uniting families is something that people do not seem to think about. It is as if the people on that side of the House are out of touch with reality. They are out of touch with real people and real Canadians and what they suffer.

With many immigrant families who come here, both of them are working. They are working two jobs and trying to make ends meet. They are trying to build something. We have seen how successful Canada has been with that.

●(1645)

By the second generation, we have seen immigrants suddenly become wealthy, putting a stake in our country, creating jobs, building our nation, strengthening it, integrating themselves into the economic, social, political and cultural life of our country, being creators, actors, writers, business people, strong families and building strong citizens within their families and those of their children.

We used to be proud of that. We were number one in the world in terms of how people came here and settled, and not only settled with the ability to say that they were in Canada and now they could be Canadians, but also being told that they should also remember where they came from, their language, culture and roots, that in fact that enriched our nation.

When I was minister for multiculturalism, in 1997 we had asked for a research paper to be done on how immigrants were benefiting the country and how immigrants were integrating. We found that in fact by encouraging immigrants to come and to maintain a sense of identity with where they came from, while at the same time becoming strong Canadians, obeying the laws and looking at the values of Canada, we suddenly had a massive advantage as a trading nation.

The Conference Board showed us this advantage in 1997. As a trading nation, we depend on trade for 45% of our gross domestic product. We were able to go to countries from which all of immigrants came, taking with them their understanding of the language, culture and marketplace. We had the ability to trade with other countries in a sensitive manner.

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That is how Canada opened up to China. That is why we are doing so much trade with India. That is why we see people from other nations coming here and bringing the gift of that ability to increase our trade to us. Then Prime Minister Chrétien, as soon as that report came out, started his trade missions, bringing first and second-generation immigrants with him as he tried to lead trade with all the countries we had never traded with before.

Immigration was about that. This idea is gone. Immigrants are people we want to bring in to use them and discard them when we do not need them anymore. The idea of nation building is not as strong as it was. The idea of nation building is laughed at. It is seen as some sort of joke.

Young couples working hard would want their grandparents to come. They do not have the ability to get a national child care program going. They need to have their grandma or their mother looking after their kids at home, so they can work and contribute to the economy.

It is this kind of ability to understand how things link and integrate with each other to form a society, whether that society is economically productive or not. The government does not seem to get that.

What the government is doing is intervening, as it has done in looking at the backlog, creating an even worse backlog. It continues to create problems because of a lack of in-depth understanding, an inability to consult with people and find some answers from a broadbase of Canadians and not simply from its friends and colleagues who agree with it.

If we keep talking to ourselves all the time, creativity and innovation will never occur, solutions to problems that have been dogging us will not occur. The government does not seem to understand that. It continues to make its decisions from within. It continues to make decisions that make matters worse.

Then, when the problem explodes in everyone's face and the public suddenly realizes there is a problem, we suddenly see ministers scurrying about and going right back to the old ways in order to say that they have fixed it. It is a farce and it is a joke. It shows the incompetence of the government. Spin is great, having one-liners is great and sitting there and reading their answers in question period is great when it does not seem to get or understand the complexity of the situations we face.

The whole issue of backlogs and of temporary foreign workers is only one small example of how we have become a nation that many of us do not recognize anymore. I hear this every day, not only in my riding but across the country.

People who are Canadians and who have been Canadians, who are immigrants, new and old, are all saying that they do not recognize Canada anymore. They do not know who we are or what we are doing. They desperately want their old Canada back.

● (1650)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague and her comments, but her facts are somewhat seen through rose-coloured lenses.

When this government was elected in 2006, we inherited a backlog of some 900,000 files from her government. She said that her government had fixed the problem.

I wonder if the member could tell the House what mechanisms her government used to construct a system that was supposed to be so well put together, because 900,000 files seems like an enormous number of files to let languish and not address. Could the member speak a little to how her government acquired 900,000 files with which it did not deal?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is just another example of how the government does not understand the complexity of the issue.

Under Conservative and Liberal governments there have been backlogs. Backlogs are a problem and everyone has been trying to find ways to resolve them. Ministers travelled across the country and met with communities and a lot of experts on immigration. They tried to find ways to fix the problem.

What the hon. member does not know is that in 2004-05 the prime minister gave me the role of dealing with all the internationally trained workers who could not find work here. The minister of immigration at the time was beginning to develop policies on what he heard when he travelled across the country about ways to deal with the backlogs. This was beginning to happen but we lost the election and the Conservatives took over. They say that they are fixing the problem, but we have a bigger backlog. Not only that, people cannot get their parents and grandparents here to spend time with them and/or live here and help them out.

● (1655)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver Centre has an incredibly deep understanding of the issue and the ability to communicate it very effectively. Given her experience, we should be taking her advice.

I particularly agree with her notion that nation-building includes family reunification. Parents and grandparents are very much a part of the family unit. They are more than an emotional or sentimental part. They are an economic part of the family unit.

I wonder if the member could give the House her thoughts about the super visa. I get so many complaints about super visas, which is another bit of spin the government uses. They really are not available to many people because of the cost of the insurance that has to be purchased, thousands of dollars I understand, particularly with respect to older parents who want to visit for the two-year super visa period. Could my friend from Vancouver Centre comment on that?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, that was an important question. The concept of the super visa is an exclusionary concept. The super visa is for people who can afford to pay for it.

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Many immigrants come to our country without much money. When I came here, I had a medical degree, but my husband and I came with \$200 in our pockets. I happen to know that many of my patients and constituents came here with nothing. They work three jobs. They bus tables, wash dishes and work a day job. They will do anything to help themselves. How will these people find this money? The super visa only allows the kinds of visitors that the government wants to come here, the sort of screened people, the people that we want in our country.

We have become an exclusionary nation. We pick and choose who we want. Immigrants have to come from the right part of the world. They need to have money. They have to do what we want them to do. They have to build a new type of nation, a grand new vision that the Conservative government seems to have in mind. Stopping people who are poor or who do not have much money and cannot afford to pay for these visas is discriminatory. They cannot visit their families nor see their grandchildren grow. They cannot watch their families thrive.

That is all I can say. It is an exclusion. It is a discriminatory kind of thing.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, anyone who has visited Saanich—Gulf Islands will know that it is an extraordinarily beautiful riding, but it is not known for being particularly multicultural or ethnically diverse. Therefore, I find it astonishing that 85% to 90% of the constituency cases that I have relate to immigration matters because the system has become increasingly complex. As the member for Vancouver Centre just said, the system has become increasingly focused on picking and choosing people who are wanted for a commercial basis. We have abandoned family reunification.

I have one constituent whose wife, who came from Australia, had been waiting for quite a long time for her permanent residency. In fact, it was to the point where she was exactly nine months pregnant. Immigration Canada told her she had to get back to Australia. Medically, it was not safe for her to fly at that time.

We hear heart-wrenching, horrible cases all the time, even in my riding which is not particularly ethnically diverse. These cases take up most of my constituency staff's time.

It would be an inefficiency to make this system so extremely arbitrary and so extremely unfriendly to family reunification and to new Canadians who want to live here. I would ask my friend for her comments.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, indeed, Vancouver Centre has large new immigrant populations that have been coming from eastern Europe, from parts of Africa, from Latin America, and we see this. I have one staff member in my constituency office and that is all he does. We have watched the number of cases triple and quadruple since the government came to power and most notably within the last three years.

The stories really are heart-rending. Canada is becoming known as a country with no compassion. It used to be that we were a country of compassion. It has become a country in which people feel we are not fair, that we want to keep certain people out and we want to bring certain people in.

I do not think this will not bode well for us as we try to increase trade with certain countries that today are down, but tomorrow will be up. Even if we looked at it from a purely pragmatic and economic point of view, that ability to trade with other countries depends on how they view us.

Do they see us as that kind of gentler nation? Do they see us as that compassionate nation? Why do people want to come here? It was because of the reputation that Canada had as a place where people had opportunity, they could grow and they could be anything they wanted to be. They could bring their families and put down roots. They could be the prime minister, a minister or anything they wanted to be.

This Canada is fast losing that reputation. It is very sad. I came here because I believed in this country, and I am finding myself feeling extremely sad about what is happening.

• (1700)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to participate in the concurrence motion today. As a member of the citizenship and immigration committee, I was there day in and day out participating in the study on the issue of backlogs in our immigration system. It is a problem that started with the Liberal government and has not been dealt with sufficiently by our current Conservative government. The immigration backlog today stands at over one million applications and has increased by 250,000 applications since 2006.

Backlogs leave families in a state of uncertainty and in perpetual limbo. Working as the member of Parliament for Scarborough—Rouge River, I have spoken with many families who have been waiting years and years to have their parents and grandparents join them here in Canada. They have been waiting years for their families to be reunited.

Canada is a country built on immigration. Many of us in the room, including myself, have benefited from the policies that have encouraged families to come together to Canada. My father came first and then he sponsored my mother and my three sisters. We were able to be reunited as a family because of Canada's immigration policies.

The current backlog and inequalities in our immigration system shamefully leave people waiting too long to be reunited with their families. We need to invest in resources that would address the backlog and the inequities. We need to ensure that we are encouraging people to come to Canada, to be a part of their family, to help build our communities in Canada and help our economy grow, especially help the local economic development of our communities.

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Canada needs immigration to help build and sustain our economy. However, what we are seeing is a dramatic increase in the number of temporary foreign workers, where workers come to Canada alone without their families, send their wages home and then leave Canada at the end of their contract. To these workers, we are saying they are good enough to come work here, but not good enough to come live here. Then the other situation is where we are seeing many permanent residents of Canada, the cream of the crop in their home countries, who have been invited to come to Canada as permanent residents. They are having difficulty finding work, probably because the government likes to fill the available jobs with temporary foreign workers. We are telling these people who have come to Canada on the permanent residency track that they are good enough to come live here, but not good enough to come work here.

There is a clear problem in the government's response and ideas of immigration. There is a clear split personality disorder happening here with the government. It has shifted its focus from prioritizing permanent resident applications to the temporary foreign worker program, meaning that the applicants in the family class have to actually compete for the very limited processing resources. We heard this from the Citizenship and Immigration Canada officials who came as witnesses in front of our committee.

This shift in the priorities is certainly not helping to reduce the backlog, but rather is helping to increase Canada's backlog. We need to address the inequalities that exist in the system and develop a creative, balanced and equitable approach to dealing with the backlog. This includes possibly raising the overall level of immigration so that we are accepting 1% of our population here in Canada.

In the report from the citizenship and immigration committee, we saw that there were over one million applications in the queue and wait times have reached patently unacceptable levels. On average, we are seeing that, for sponsors who are trying to have their parents reunited with them here in Canada, it could take between 10 and 13 years for a parent or grandparent to be united with their family. Sadly, for multiple cases in Scarborough, for families I have been trying to help, grandparents have passed on before they were able to even come here to meet their grandchildren. Sadly, our immigration system is failing so many Canadians who are just trying to have their families united.

● (1705)

It also means that employers who are seeking to attract skilled workers frequently have to wait between four and seven years. We know that with the changing trends in the labour market and the changing needs of the labour market, if an employer has to wait four to seven years for a worker to be able to fill a job vacancy, that employer is probably not even going to be in business by the time the employee it has sponsored is able to join it in the labour force.

We are seeing live-in caregivers seeking to reunite with their spouses and children wait an average of five years from the date that they complete their obligations under that program.

We heard about spousal applications. At committee we heard the minister and officials from CIC say that is the class of sponsorship that is given the highest priority. Its goal is, from beginning to end, 12 months of processing time. The sad reality is it is taking more

than two years to process a spousal application, depending on the country. This situation presents a serious problem for the integrity of Canada's immigration system. Families remain separated. Employers are frustrated. Overall, it is the Canadian economy that continues to suffer.

I would like to talk about some of the changing labour force trends we are seeing in Canada. The statistics I am about to present are from a study done by Statistics Canada called "Projected Trends to 2031 for the Canadian Labour Force" by Laurent Martel, Éric Caron Malenfant, Jean-Dominique Morency, André Lebel, Alain Bélanger and Nicolas Bastien.

The authors have written that in 2010, Canada's labour force was 18.5 million persons. By 2031, it is projected to grow to reach between 20.5 million and 22.5 million people.

The total population aged 15 and over, that is of course the overall labour force participation rate, will fall. The authors say that their share of the labour force is projected to decrease. The participation rate will fall from 67% in 2010 to between 59.7% and 62.6% in 2031. These levels have not been observed since the 1970s.

Furthermore, the authors have said that there will be an increase in the number of labour force participants aged 55 and over. In 2001, approximately 10% of the labour force were aged 55 and over. By 2010, it grew to 17%. By 2021, it will grow to approximately 24%. One out of four people are going to be 55 and over. We know that with the changes to the qualification for old age security and guaranteed income supplement, many of our seniors who would have retired... At the time this report was prepared, that legislation had not come into effect, so the authors took labour force participation to age 65 rather than 67. The numbers will be changing and we will see even more than 24% of our labour force by 2021 being people who are aged 55 to 67.

Furthermore, by 2031, the authors project fewer than three people in the labour force for each person who is 65 and over and who is not in the labour force. These numbers will have to be adjusted for the new changes to the age of 67. That same ratio was close to 5:1 in 2010. These changes show there is going to be an increase in demand for the labour force to be filled. These vacancies in the labour force are not going to be filled by our children, but they can only be filled by immigration.

At committee, Statistics Canada mentioned that CIC projected that within five years, that is 60 months from the time that the report was written, immigration will be responsible for 100% of Canada's new labour market growth needs.

● (1710)

Therefore, the growth we see in the labour market will be filled 100% by higher immigration levels. For that, we need to see our immigration backlogs gone and the timely processing of our applications to maintain our integrity as a country that accepts immigrants and the fact that Canada is still a viable option for immigrants, both skilled and family class, who are coming here to build our country.

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Canada has received more applications per year than the federal government chooses to admit to the country. This was told to us in committee by Citizenship and Immigration officials, and I will read a quote from the CIC officials, who said:

CIC strives to process applications in a timely manner, but it is an ongoing challenge for CIC to meet the IRPA objectives simultaneously. Every year, we receive many more applications than can be processed resulting in large backlogs in many categories, which in turn have led to long wait times for applicants.

Even CIC officials know that our applicants are waiting far too long.

The numbers presented to the committee reveal that even a modest increase in the annual number of visas issued would actually go a substantial distance toward successfully addressing the backlogs. Mr. Marc Audet, from Desjardins Trust Inc., provided the committee with statistical information from CIC that showed that, over the last five years, increasing the annual visas issued by 10% from current levels would completely arrest the growth of the backlog. Any increase above that would start to reverse the backlog. The minister and CIC know that, as this is witness testimony in committee.

However, the question is whether an increase in Canada's annual visas issued, or levels, is justified and desirable on economic and social grounds. The evidence is overwhelming that a gradual and prudent increase to annual levels would not only address the backlog, but is essential for our labour market trends. As I mentioned earlier, we need to address the changes in the labour market trends.

Once again, from the study I mentioned earlier, the proportion of foreign-born individuals in the Canadian labour force in 1991 was 18.5%; in 2006, it grew to 21.2%; and by 2031, it will grow to 33% if we maintain our current immigration levels. However, we know that current immigration levels are not sufficient to fill the labour market vacancies that will become available. Therefore, the authors of the study wrote, "Although sustained immigration...could neither prevent the overall participation rate from declining nor lessen the aging of the labour force, it could contribute to labour force growth while also filling various specific labour force needs."

The experts who wrote this study also suggested that increasing immigration levels would actually help meet the labour force needs in Canada. They mentioned that the size and growth of the labour force over the next two decades are sensitive to two factors: immigration and fertility.

As we know, fertility rates in Canada are declining. The study showed that if Canada were to admit no immigrants over the next two decades, the labour force would actually begin to shrink by 2017. That is just a few short years away. The labour force would be reduced to 17.8 million by 2031 if we were to stop immigration, whereas if we maintained our current levels, we would see our labour force grow to, if I remember correctly, about 33 million by 2031, according to the authors of the study.

Once again, increasing immigration levels is a clear solution that was offered by many witnesses who came to our committee as well as experts in the field of statistics and labour market trends. Also, industry representatives at committee pointed to a significant present and future deficit in the labour supply.

•(1715)

The Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association testified that its members will have 142,000 job vacancies in 2025.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and many building trades affiliate labour unions have publicly stated that they are dependent upon temporary foreign workers because of a shortage of permanent-stream immigrants and skilled Canadians.

We need to stop investing in temporary foreign workers and actually invest in training Canadians to have the skills that are needed to fulfill the labour market needs and to, also, as we accept people to come to Canada, ensure that we are accepting people on a permanent track rather than as temporary foreign workers.

New Democrats have fought strongly against many of the unfair changes made to our immigration system this past year. We know that one solution the minister came up with to reduce the backlog was to hit delete. The minister approved the deletion of 280,000 applications that were in the permanent stream. This is absolutely unfair for the people who were waiting patiently. They were told to wait patiently. They were told to follow the rules. They were constantly told to wait and be patient, follow the rules, that in due time their application would be processed.

Instead, all applications before February 2007 were just deleted and the applicants were told they could have a refund if they wanted, but they needed to reapply if they were still interested in coming to Canada.

It is absolutely unfair to the people who put in an application on time, did their time. They waited throughout that long backlog, that long wait period, to come to Canada and now in my riding the family members of many of these people who are now deleted are writing to me, asking for fairness.

Where is the fairness in this program, in the changes to immigration that the current government and the current minister have put forward? I do not know where the fairness is.

I want to talk briefly about the importance of parents and grandparents. The backlog for parents and grandparents currently sits at about 150,000 applicants, yet, rather than committing to look for a creative balanced solution to the backlog, the Conservatives have reverted to, of course, their usual strategy: cuts. They have imposed a moratorium on parent and grandparent class sponsorships. We are actually nervous that their temporary try on the moratorium of parent and grandparent class sponsorship might actually lead to permanent quotas, which would mean that too many young children in Canada, too many young Canadian children, are not going to have the benefit of knowing their grandparents.

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I was lucky. I had the opportunity to meet my grandparents in Canada. Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to meet all of my grandparents, as my paternal grandfather had passed away before he was able to come and visit us here in Canada. However, I had the great pleasure and luxury of knowing my maternal grandparents and my paternal grandmother who lived with us, who I learned from, who I was cultured by. They helped me understand who I am and my roots. My grandmother taught me to cook. Those simple things in life, but also the principles and values of a strong, united family, I learned these values from my grandparents.

Sadly, too many Canadian children are not going to have the luxury of knowing their grandparents if the government continues in its style of not allowing parent and grandparent sponsorships.

There is a family sponsorship case in the Scarborough—Rouge River riding that the MP office has been working on since December 2006, which has been stalled in the medical and background checks for what seems like an inordinate amount of time. The sponsor has been trying to bring his mother to Canada as he would like her to spend her remaining years with him and his children. She is very elderly and is now in need of support from her family at this late stage of her life.

● (1720)

Even though it has been seven years that I have been working with him to try to help expedite the process so that the grandchildren of this woman will be able to have that experience, we have still not been successful. He is bogged down in red tape.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend from the NDP talked about family reunification. It is quite remarkable, frankly, that she would talk about family reunification—which is something I agree with, incidentally—juxtaposed with the comments by the member for Willowdale, who said that the government would like to apply the just-in-time approach, turning immigrants into commodities, like parts that have to come from a parts manufacturer, and getting them to the car assembly line just in time to assemble the car. Commodifying immigrants is deadly wrong.

Going back to the point on family reunification, the member knows as well as I that parents and grandparents who come here are more than sentimental parts of a family, more than emotional parts. They are an economic part to a family unit as well, looking after grandchildren so their kids can go to work, or joining in the family business so the business can grow. That is what nation building is all about. I am sure the member's family were nation builders. My family were nation builders. Many immigrants in Guelph were.

Could she talk more about the value of family reunification and the need to take the freeze off family reunification?

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, he is right that commodifying humans is not okay. I come from a business background and just-in-time management might be suitable for widgets and parts, but it is not necessarily the best way forward for humans and not the smartest way of dealing with our immigration system.

Family reunification has been highlighted as a reason for Canada's success in attracting and retaining experienced and highly skilled

applicants. It is even supposed to be a core principle of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and yet the Conservative government today wants workers to come to Canada, not families.

We know our grandparents are the ones raising our children. Many people in Scarborough—Rouge River speak to me about the importance of having their mother or father or parents, if they are alive, join them in Canada to help with child rearing. We know the government has refused the NDP's calls for a national child care strategy, which would ensure that both parents could go into the workforce, and yet it does not seem to like that idea either. It is the grandparents who are helping to raise our children. My grandmother helped raise me. She ensured that our local economy was stimulated by both parents working. With both parents working, of course, households have higher levels of income, which means they are stimulating the development of our local economies.

● (1725)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all have a lot of empathy for people who come from far away and choose Canada as their nation for their future and their children's future. That is because we have many blessings in Canada.

Historically, in the early part of the previous century and the century before that, people would have no way of contacting their relatives back home. Times have changed a lot. We find ourselves in the present situation where there are skill sets that Canada needs and the demand from people wanting to come to Canada far exceeds the capacity for Canada to absorb that many people.

The changes that the immigration minister has made really reflect the modern-day reality of immigration and allow Canada to select professions and immigrants who best match our workplace needs as a society, allowing for other things as well as family reunification. Surely the immigration system should be designed to create a stronger, better Canada, and that is exactly what the immigration minister has done.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, my response to the comment from the Minister of State (Transport) is that all of us in Canada, except for aboriginal peoples, are immigrants. I may be first generation Canadian, she may be second generation, he may be third or seventh generation, but all of us in Canada, except for our aboriginal peoples, are immigrants or have the lineage of an immigrant.

In that respect, I agree with the minister in saying that the immigrants who came to Canada a century ago may have had difficulties communicating with their families abroad because the technologies were not available. However, if the minister is implying that, because Internet is now available and we can have Skype chats with family members abroad, juxtaposed, that should counter the need for immigration and for families to be truly united in a space, I truly do not know how to respond to that type of comment. There are so many parts of this world that are war-stricken or just do not have the capacity for broadband or do not have the capacity for a voice chat. There is a huge difference in the quality of life between reading a letter or having a phone conversation with somebody and being able to feel the embrace of a grandparent or parent.

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[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passionate speech, and I join with her to say that I, too, am an immigrant and proud to be Canadian.

I will talk about my particular case. When I came to Canada, I was a doctor by training, but I had to retake courses to obtain my equivalency. I had young children. Despite the many obstacles, I sponsored their grandmother. Had she not been able to come, I would not be here today.

All that to say that if we want those that we allow to become Canadians to make a contribution to this country, we also have to think about their relations—their parents, their wife or their partner. We know that family ties make nation building possible.

I also heard the comments by our colleague opposite. He said that we need to match immigration to the economy. According to the statistics, Canada is grappling with an aging population and a declining birth rate. One in five Canadians is over 60 and, according to forecasts, that number will be one in three by 2020. Furthermore, CIC estimates that in five years, or 60 months, new needs for skilled labour in Canada will be met entirely by immigration. How can the hon. member say that? Under this government, the immigration rate has fallen to a historic low of 0.7%.

Could my colleague comment on the economic contribution of immigrants when they are allowed to bring their family members to Canada?

• (1730)

[*English*]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's passionate intervention and her contribution to Canada's economic growth and viability and the contributions her mother has made that allowed a strong woman to, as a doctor, pursue her foreign credential recognition here in Canada, which is an extremely difficult process, and participate in Canada as a practising physician. I applaud her for that.

To answer the member's question about the importance of economic class as well as family class immigrants into Canada, yes it is imperative that we do have economic class immigrants coming in. As I mentioned in my speech, within five years 100% of our labour force needs will be filled by immigration. To satisfy the changes in our labour market trends, we will need to see economic class immigrants accepted into this country. However, for those economic class immigrants who are allowed in to plant deep roots and make as meaningful as possible contributions to Canada's economic viability, growth and development, they need to have their family. That means their spouse, their children and, as in the case of my colleague, possibly the grandparents to help with the rearing of —

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak to the second report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration presented on Tuesday, March 6, 2012.

We, in our party, under the leadership of the member for Winnipeg North as immigration critic, have expressed significant concern about the way the government is approaching immigration issues. There seems to be a startling lack of vision as to the importance to Canada's economy and Canada's cultural mosaic of immigration in the past, immigration in the present and immigration in the future.

There seems to be a commodification of immigrants, almost as widgets, as the member for Guelph said in terms of some of the Conservatives referring to immigrants coming here for just-in-time delivery. They describe immigration as one would a manufacturing protocol. In many ways, it does not reflect the incredible importance of Canada's multicultural communities and the contributions they have made to our economy and to our country and regions as nation-builders.

It is very important, on all sides of the House and in all parties, that we demonstrate leadership on the immigration issue. Part of good, responsible politics is pedagogy whereby we actually go out and change people's minds.

There are some myths and some perceptions about immigration that I think the public may have sometimes that we have to challenge as members of Parliament and as thought leaders, not only in this Parliament but in our greater communities. One is that immigrants, when they come here, are always taking jobs from Canadians. I witnessed this even in the last election. I represent a rural and small town riding in Nova Scotia, in Hants Country in the Annapolis Valley.

One thing I think we need, not just in cities but in rural and small town Canada, is to attract and retain more new Canadians. When I was asked in the last election, sometimes at all-candidates meetings, about ideas to create growth and opportunity in Kings—Hants and in rural Nova Scotia, I often cited the potential of immigration. When I did, some people would ask if those people would not just come here and take jobs from them.

When I talked to people, I found that there was a broad perception that this was a zero-sum game. I did a little research on this. In fact, *The Chronicle Herald*, the provincial newspaper in Nova Scotia, did an online survey of its readership a couple of years ago. They asked if people would support programs to attract and retain more new Canadians to Nova Scotia. It was not a scientific poll; it was an online poll in the paper. Sixty-five percent of the respondents said that they would not support programs to attract and retain more new Canadians to Nova Scotia. I read some of the comments. The comments asked why we would help more new Canadians come here when we cannot keep our own young people employed and are losing them to other parts of the country. There are not enough jobs for them.

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I challenge that misperception when I am dealing with people in my riding and elsewhere, because when I think of new Canadians who have come to Nova Scotia, I think of people who were not only successful in creating their own employment but in creating jobs for other Nova Scotians. I think of people like Pete Luckett or Hanspeter Stutz or Doris Hagmann. I think of Joe Rafih or Basim Halef or Fred George or Wadih Fares. These are people who came to Nova Scotia with nothing.

● (1735)

Keep in mind what constitutes being an entrepreneur. One has to be a risk taker. One has to risk it all to succeed. The moment people leave their country and choose Canada as a new home, they are demonstrating what it takes to be entrepreneurs. They are risking it all.

It should be of little surprise to people that these are some of the greatest entrepreneurs we have in our province, in our region and in our country, because by the very decision to come here, they rolled the dice. They took that risk. They were entrepreneurs who took a chance and bet it all to come to Canada. They are the most special Canadians, in many ways.

My family has been in Canada, in Hants county, since the late 1700s. We have been blessed to be here for such a long time. I was lucky enough to be born in this magnificent country, in a beautiful part of Nova Scotia, and raised in a community like Cheverie, but I did not have to take any risk to have that privilege. We take it for granted. These people risked it all to come here.

Sometimes it is important for us to refocus this debate a little bit on the extraordinary people who choose to come to Canada. They are not commodities. They are not widgets. They are living, breathing, nation builders of the finest order. We need them to build businesses and opportunities for themselves, their families and our families.

We need them as natural bridges to some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. When we talk about trade, the reality is that we have growing trade deficits under the Conservative government. For a long time we have recognized multiculturalism as a very successful social policy in Canada, but far too often we do not recognize what a remarkable economic advantage multiculturalism gives us. In those human bridges to these fast-growing economies, there are opportunities for us, whether it is in research connections between our universities and colleges and their universities and colleges or whether it is in business and trade. We have to remind ourselves that we are part of a globalized economy and that our trade relationships and cultural ties are increasingly important.

We see multiculturalism increasingly in the face of this Parliament among my colleagues from all parties in this House. Think of how important it is to bring that into the debates that we have the perspectives representing our multicultural communities here in the House of Commons. That is important and represents progress.

It is important also to realize that we pressed the delete button on 300,000 files. The government may look at them as files, but these are not files; these are families. These are families with real hopes, aspirations and dreams of coming here and building a better Canada.

Part of the reason the temporary foreign workers program grew to be mismanaged, and in some cases perhaps abused or at least used for purposes that were contrary to the stated objectives of the program from its genesis, was because the government hit the delete button and eliminated a lot of applications for skilled workers and professionals who wanted to come to Canada.

● (1740)

From a public policy perspective, that is not the way to deal with an issue to that effect. If there is an issue, then let us put more resources into the processing of these applications. Instead, we know that the government is cutting programs and agencies. Based on a report by Kevin Page a few weeks ago, these cuts are affecting government front-line services, such as immigration.

At the finance committee recently, and in my motion, Motion No. 315, which passed in this House last June, mandating the House of Commons finance committee to study the issue of income inequality, we heard that one of the contributors to income inequality is the fact that there is little investment in settling new Canadians so that they get a good start. We know that is important. It is one of the contributors to growing levels of income and opportunity inequality in Canada. We need to make more investments with respect to immigrant settlement. However, we do not hear that as a priority of the government. All we hear about is cuts and a startling lack of vision.

The potential for these new Canadians to contribute significantly not only to the prosperity of their families but to the prosperity of all our families and communities would be exponentially increased with an even modest increase in investment in resettlement.

Also, I have noticed the government's movement with respect to language criteria and wanting new Canadians coming here to speak one of the two official languages. That may be popular with the general public, but I am not sure it is right or smart economically or socially. There are an awful lot of tremendously successful people who came to Canada who could not speak either of the official languages yet were great nation builders. There are people in this House of Commons whose parents came to Canada as immigrants and could not speak the language when they arrived. I have sat in caucus with members of Parliament who when they arrived in Canada could not speak one of the two official languages and ended up being members of Parliament and cabinet ministers.

Frank Stronach was an industrialist who arrived in Canada unable to speak either of Canada's official languages, yet he built a global business in Magna International, employing thousands of people and becoming a billionaire. He arrived in Canada with a trade. I think he was a machinist, but he had no capacity to speak either of Canada's official languages. Under these new rules, someone like Frank Stronach would not have made it. Think about that.

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Therefore, it is important that we be a lot more open-minded about immigration and work to change people's mindsets to avoid some of the language I have heard in this debate when we are talking about immigrants. Let us move toward increased resources aimed at attracting, retaining and supporting new Canadians when they get to our country.

I want to speak a bit about my region of Atlantic Canada, specifically Nova Scotia and rural Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia, and in the Maritimes in general, we are dealing with both a population teetering on the brink of decline and an aging population. That is an economic and demographic time bomb, because as our population gets smaller and older, we will have fewer people actively in the workforce paying into the system. More people will be at an age and stage in life when they will be drawing from the system. Seniors contribute massively to our communities, but a lot of the senior citizens I talk with are equally concerned about this demographic trend.

● (1745)

Five years ago, the median age of the Nova Scotia population was 42 years of age. It is now 44 years of age. Five years ago, the percentage of the population age 65 and over was 15.1%. It is now 16.6%. Additionally, 3,000 fewer students are starting school each year in Nova Scotia.

These trends should scare the heck out of us in my province. A larger percentage of retirees and a smaller proportion of productive workers means lower productive output and higher demands for social services. Fewer young people working equals a declining tax base and it also reflects fewer creative minds and ultimately less innovation, less entrepreneurship, less research and development and less commercialization.

The reality is that the best way to tackle the demographic time bomb in our region is to attract more new Canadians to Atlantic Canada. The Nova Scotia government has recognized our demographic challenge and it has announced an intention to do more to attract new Canadians to Nova Scotia.

However, one of the challenges faced by provincial governments is the immigration cap imposed by the federal government. If the four Atlantic provinces worked together on a common immigration strategy, I believe they would have more clout in dealing with the Conservative government on this issue.

I believe we can learn from Manitoba's successful immigration model. Manitoba and Nova Scotia have similarly sized populations, but in the last ten years, Manitoba's population has grown by almost 9%, while Nova Scotia's population has only grown by a little over 1%. The key difference is immigration. Last year, Nova Scotia took in 15% of the total number of immigrants recruited by Manitoba. That is 2,400 in Nova Scotia versus 16,000 in Manitoba.

Manitoba has made immigration a priority across every department of government and in partnership with businesses, communities, volunteer organizations, schools and health care providers. As a result of immigration, Manitoba's population is growing and it is getting younger. Furthermore, Manitoba has been successful in attracting immigrants not just to Winnipeg but to small towns and

communities across the province. We can learn from what they have done in Manitoba.

In Nova Scotia, we have some of the finest higher education institutions in the country, some world-class universities. We have hundreds of students from dozens of countries around the world studying in Nova Scotia. Imagine what would be possible if we could do more to encourage these bright and talented minds to live and work there after graduation, creating jobs and opportunities in Nova Scotia.

Our geographic position on the Atlantic Ocean is a natural advantage, and we should be aiming to become world class in all things ocean-related. Nova Scotia is home to 450 Ph.D.s in ocean-related disciplines. That is the third highest concentration in the world. The Bedford Institute of Oceanography has 700 scientists, engineers and technicians. Approximately 200 ocean technology companies now account for a third of our province's research and development. A lot of those people are coming from other countries.

When we think of the innovation companies as examples of success, whether it is Acadian Seaplants Ltd. or Ocean Nutrition, we need more new Canadians to help develop that industry and other industries. We need more new Canadians to help develop the growing grape and wine industry in Nova Scotia. The reality is that in 1997, there were 2 wineries in Nova Scotia and today there are almost 19. To put it into perspective, in 1997 there were 19 wineries in the Niagara region and today there are 130.

We need people to develop that industry, and one of the things that is interesting right now is that the hardest hit European economies include countries like Portugal, Italy, Spain and France, which have some of the highest concentrations of expertise in grapes and wine in the world. We should be having targeted immigration, like the Manitoba model, bringing the business community and the governments together at all levels. We should have a targeted immigration strategy on bringing that expertise and those people from those countries, some of which have a 40% to 50% youth unemployment rate. We should bring those people in and give them an opportunity to help us turbocharge our wine industry.

● (1750)

These are ideas we should be developing in the House, working across party lines in a constructive and positive way and speaking about immigration as a source not just of multicultural diversity but of economic opportunity for our country. That is the way this debate should be shaped. It should not be based on partisan differences and trying to pit people against one another, and particularly—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of State for Transport.

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Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member pointed to Manitoba, which is my home province. The success we have seen in Manitoba is 100% due to our federal government, and we are looking forward to more success with some adaptations.

Having immigrants being fluent in either French or English increases the likelihood of their entering the workforce, virtually immediately.

Also, taking into consideration the skill sets people bring, in the beginning of the last century, Manitoba brought in Mennonites and Ukrainians to help farm the land. That was a skill we needed then. Today, there are different skills, and the government has identified those.

We could go into partisan jabs that there were a million people backlogged under the previous administration, and so on, but would the member agree that not only do new Canadians often appreciate Canada more than multi-generational Canadians, but if they are young and skilled, those new Canadians should have first crack at entering Canada as citizens?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the reality is the Manitoba model, I believe, goes back over 14 years. It was implemented in partnership with the federal government, a Liberal government for most of that time. Therefore, for him to say that it is all due to the current government not only defies fact but it does not reflect the reality that federal and provincial governments need to work together and no one has a monopoly on ideas. For instance, I do not mind saying that a provincial NDP government in Manitoba has had great innovation on this file.

I would also ask him to speak with one of the innovators from the business community in his province, Art DeFehr from Palliser Furniture. He should talk to Art, who has been a great business leader in Manitoba but also has been an innovator in this area of immigration. He has great concerns about the direction in which the Conservative government is going on the immigration file.

Again, I am openly questioning whether the movement toward a more restrictive approach, even on language, is good for the economy, if we consider some of the greatest people we have attracted who could not speak either language when they arrived. I go back to the example of Frank Stronach—

• (1755)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We have a great deal of interest in questions and comments, and we need to leave some time for other members.

The hon. member for Hochelaga.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just received a letter; it is hot off the press. It is a request to stay an imminent deportation, a real case, caused by an administrative delay.

Leopoldo Granados Dominguez from Hochelaga applied for permanent residence for his wife and her daughter. However, because of an administrative delay, his wife and her daughter are being deported tomorrow. The couple has two young children

together. Nevertheless, their mother has to leave tomorrow, all because of an administrative delay, no less.

If I do not show this letter to two ministers here and if they do not look at it, this woman will have to leave and two of her children will be left with only their father.

Does my colleague find these kinds of situations fair? Is this the result of Conservative policies?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that more resources need to be allocated to the immigration department, because the Conservatives' cuts have made the situation even worse and things are very difficult.

My colleague's constituents are lucky to have an MP who is so committed to this issue. Many people and their families do not have the access they need to the process.

Clearly, the Conservatives' cuts are bad for people and bad for immigrants. They have created sad and difficult situations for many ethnocultural communities and families across Canada.

I very much appreciate my colleague's intervention.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I tried to raise this earlier today. Members will recall that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism caused a huge increase in the backlog. He came out with what he called Ministerial Instructions 1 and under that instruction the backlog literally skyrocketed by 140,000. Then he started to criticize the previous government saying it increased the backlog when, in fact, all on his own, he increased the backlog as did no other minister before him. The reason I raise that issue is that a year later he was saying the problem had to be fixed. What he did to fix the problem was hit the delete button.

My colleague addressed this issue in part in his remarks. This is not about files—I believe the member said—but about people who had hopes and dreams, who postponed their lives in their home countries in anticipation that some day they would be able to come to Canada as immigrants. The minister said he would hit the delete button and they would not exist.

An hon. member: There were 300, 000.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: There were 300,000, which is a huge number, and they are individuals, let alone the families involved.

I wonder if the member might want to pick up on that particular point with regard to what it is the minister actually did by hitting the delete button.

• (1800)

Hon. Scott Brison: There are all kinds of areas, Mr. Speaker, where the government has created a crisis and then created another one in trying to fix it. The callousness of eliminating all those applicants is very damaging to our reputation in the world. That is a risk we have. The damage that may have been rendered on our reputation as part of that is incalculable. It is heartbreaking to a lot of families. The family reunification measures and accesses are absolutely critical.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to the visa requirement on Mexico, schools, universities and Acadia University in my riding lost students as a result of that. It directly hurt some of the employers in my riding. It was done without any negotiation or discussion with Mexico. It was imposed on Mexico. It really did a lot of damage to our relationship with Mexico, a NAFTA partner. I should not have to remind anyone that it is a NAFTA partner.

There is a lack of compassion in the way the government has dealt with some of these files. There is also a lack of professionalism in the way the government has dealt with some of these files.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague, the member for Kings—Hants, who spoke previously, has particularly pursued the issue of income inequality over the last number of months and years and has had some frustrations in getting that debated. This is a significant issue, particularly in the context of income inequality between immigrant groups and native-born people, but also among immigrant groups as well.

I feel like I am somewhat well-positioned to talk about this. Scarborough—Guildwood is home to pretty well every people group one can possibly name. I can literally march down Markham Road and talk about quite a number of groups that find themselves in Scarborough.

One of the universal issues is the processing times for visitor visas, for family reunification, for citizenship applications, et cetera. In my office, we have somebody who is devoted absolutely full time and she never has a slow day. All she deals with are the frustrations that she has, particularly with the government and the lack of information from it in terms of processing times and access to basic information. This is becoming more and more of an issue for us who have the honour to represent heavily immigrant ridings.

My colleague talked about the economic benefits that flow from an in-flow of immigrants. He comes from Nova Scotia and I represent a riding in the GTA. The GTA adds about 100,000 people on an annual basis, and some of the folks are extraordinarily skilled. They bring employment skills and other skills to our ridings, yet they are finding a lot of frustrations.

The interesting point is with respect to this temporary foreign workers program. Many of my constituents take slightly above entry level jobs at various institutions, both pharmaceutical and financial, where they are doing essentially data processing, yet I have had representations from those very same people who only arrived here maybe a year ago or two, three or four years ago and have what might well be described as a good job, yet they find themselves training foreign workers and training themselves out of a job. What a perverse policy that effectively says that we welcome them as immigrants, but they have to train their replacement.

These are the frustrations and contradictions that come out of the government. It is the delay. It cannot just make the world go away with a delete button, and it is the contradictory policies between welcoming people who want to make an economic contribution and then having a program which effectively makes them unemployed.

● (1805)

STRENGTHENING MILITARY JUSTICE IN THE DEFENCE OF CANADA ACT

BILL C-15—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must advise that an agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) concerning the proceedings at report stage and third reading of Bill C-15, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration to dispose of the proceedings at those stages.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 49th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented earlier this day be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I moved that the 50th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented earlier this day be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I moved that the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented earlier this day be concurred in.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

• (1810)

PETITIONS

NUTRITION STRATEGY

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise and present a petition signed by dozens of Canadians who are calling on Parliament to act immediately and take leadership through the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food and develop a national child and youth nutrition strategy.

The petitioners, like many health experts, understand that access to healthy food is critically important to a child's development and that in the face of poverty and rising rates of obesity, we have to do something. A nutrition strategy is the right way forward.

LYME DISEASE

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

The first is signed by residents literally from coast to coast, from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, all the way to Vancouver, British Columbia. The petitioners call for the passage of my private member's bill, Bill C-442, which proposes to develop a national strategy on Lyme disease.

I am encouraged by the fact that so many members on all sides of the House appear to be supportive of this effort.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls for the protection of the CBC, which is Canada's national public broadcaster. This petition comes from residents of Halifax and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, as well as North Saanich and Nelson, British Columbia.

The petitioners call on the government to ensure there is adequate, secure and predictable funding for the CBC.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present the sixth petition from my riding.

The petitioners ask the House to condemn discrimination against females occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination. They ask that all members of Parliament support that.

BRAIN INJURY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions on the need for comprehensive

action on concussion in Canada to improve the lives of all those living with this brain injury. For many people living with the affects of concussion, the physiological, psychological and social impacts are devastating.

The petitioners call upon the government to enact a pan-Canadian concussion awareness week to promote understanding of the injury, develop a pan-Canadian strategy to address prevention, diagnosis and management and develop a centre of excellence in concussion research.

* * *

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

STRENGTHENING MILITARY JUSTICE IN THE DEFENCE OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-15, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to the bill, I guess, in part, because I spent my first career in the military. I always took particular interest in the justice system within the military, realizing it was somewhat different. I am glad to say that I did not have too many encounters with that justice system during my time in the navy.

However, let me summarize some of the key points the Liberal Party feels are important to talk about with respect to Bill C-15.

The Liberal Party certainly understands the need to reform the Canadian court martial system to ensure that it remains effective, fair and transparent. At the same time, our party believes that Canadian citizens who decide to join the Canadian Forces, as I did, should not, thereby, lose part of their rights before the courts.

The Liberal Party understands that rights and equality are universal. Without an effective means for appeal and no recorded proceedings, the current summary trial system is unbalanced and does not respect the basic rights of the Canadian Forces members. The Liberal Party of Canada does not believe that introducing a criminal record for Canadian Forces members for certain service offences is fair and just, as the means for pardoning offences has been recently removed by the current government.

Government Orders

Finally, the Liberal Party of Canada finds it problematic that the VCDS, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, can intervene and give direction in military police investigations. The VCDS is also subject to the Code of Service Discipline.

I will provide some background.

There are a number of disparities between the military and civil justice systems that should be narrowed as much as possible. While we recognize that updates to the military criminal justice system must be made, the government is missing a real opportunity to make these changes properly.

Many aspects of the military justice system would inexplicably remain unimproved or would provide unnecessary powers. For example, Bill C-15 would enshrine in law a list of military offences that would now carry a criminal record, some of which are hardly necessary. Without the pardon system recently revoked by the Conservative government and with the summary trial being set up as it is, with no record and no means of meaningful appeal, Canadian Forces members would be left haunted by a record and unable to find employment upon release.

As Colonel Michel Drapeau noted in his committee testimony:

...someone accused before a summary trial has no right to appeal either the verdict or the sentence. This despite the fact that the verdict and sentence are imposed without any regard to minimum standards of procedural rights in criminal proceedings, such as a right to counsel, the presence of rules of evidence, and a right to appeal.

Further quoting him:

In Canada, these rights do not exist in summary trials, not even for a decorated veteran, yet a Canadian charged with a summary conviction offence in civilian court, such as Senator Patrick Brazeau, enjoys all of these rights. So does someone appearing in a small claims court or traffic court.

I find it very odd that those who put their lives at risk to protect the rights of Canadians are themselves deprived of some of those charter rights when facing a quasi-criminal law process with the possibility of loss of liberty through detention in military barracks.

I would like to also quote from former Justice Gilles Létourneau, who provided further criticism of the summary trial system which remains largely unaddressed by the modernized version of the current bill:

This form of trial has been found to be unconstitutional in 1997 by the European Court of Human Rights because it did not meet the requirements of independence and impartiality set out in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

● (1815)

As a result of this decision and others, the British Parliament enacted legislation which now provides guarantees to an accused soldier. These provisions include the following

- (a) the accused may be represented by counsel;
- (b) the accused is entitled to an Appeal to the newly created Summary Appeal Court;
- (c) the Summary Appeal Court is presided by a civilian judge, assisted by two military members who are officers or warrant officers; and
- (d) as a general rule, imprisonment or service detention cannot be imposed where the offender is not legally represented in that court or in a court martial.

To further quote Judge Létourneau:

As a result, the British Parliament has gone a long way to ensure a fair treatment of soldiers facing summary trials. Similar changes have taken place in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand as well as France, Belgium, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania and Netherlands, to name a few. However, despite the fact the requirements of independence, impartiality, fairness and justice are the same in

Canada, and if anything they are more compelling because, in Canada, they are entrenched in the Constitution, our men and women in uniform are still denied fair treatment at a summary trial.

Furthermore, Bill C-15 gives the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff power to intervene and give direction in investigations. This is troubling, considering that he is also subject to the code of service discipline and could technically intervene on his own behalf.

Colonel Drapeau notes:

The proposed new paragraph 18.5(3) in C-15 would, in my estimation, make the current lack of independence worse by now granting authority to the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS) to issue "instructions or guidelines in respect of a particular investigation".

This is very troubling indeed.

Quoting again from Colonel Drapeau:

Keep in mind that already the CDS and the VCDS has the power to call in the NIS to conduct an investigation on any issue which is of concern to them—and, frankly, under the existing command arrangements it is most unlikely that the NIS would ignore such a request. Also, the CDS does not feel inhibited to comment publicly on an open NIS investigation.

To now give the VCDS the authority to issue instructions or guidelines in respect of a particular military police investigation will remove any pretense that the Military Police is independent from the chain of command. Lest we forget, the CDS, the VCDS and, for that matter, the JAG, are each subject to the Code of Service Discipline. None of them should have the power to direct or influence either the initiation, the suspension or the conduct of a particular police investigation let alone to issue instructions or guidelines as to the conduct of a specific investigation.

Soldiers are citizens and should enjoy the same Constitutional and charter rights as every other citizen. As Judge Létourneau so eloquently puts it:

We as a society have forgotten, with harsh consequences for the members of the armed forces that a soldier is before all a Canadian citizen, a Canadian citizen in uniform. So is a police officer; he is a Canadian citizen in uniform, but he's not deprived of his right to a jury trial. Is that what we mean by "equality of all before the law"? Is not the soldier who risks his life for us entitled to at least the same rights and equality before the law as his fellow citizens when he is facing criminal prosecutions?

The answer, of course, for all of us must be a resounding "yes".

● (1820)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with every part of the presentation of the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie. That is why I have put forward amendments to deal with the very issue raised by the hon. member, amendments to ensure that we do not allow the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff to be able to issue instructions for an investigation, something that Michel Drapeau pointed out in his testimony:

Would the mayor be able to issue a direction to the chief of the Ottawa police, even if it's in writing, about a particular investigation? The answer is "no". Would the prime minister be able to do that with the RCMP? The answer is "absolutely not". So why would it be here?

We would have a chance this evening to put this to a recorded vote instead of a division if only there were four other members of this place on the opposition benches who would vote for my amendments there before them and were willing to stand up and insist on the vote.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her comment, and I agree with a lot of what she has expressed.

Government Orders

Let me remind everybody of what is particularly troubling about allowing the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff to intervene in an investigation. We all remember what happened with Somalia, and we all remember the fact that, if it had not been for media investigation, there would have been the very serious possibility of a cover-up.

We want to make sure that kind of thing does not happen in the future. Therefore, what is being suggested in terms of changes, even at this late report stage, are eminently sensible changes that we would be glad we made for the future.

• (1825)

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to a lot of this debate today and, as both a former member of the Canadian Forces and as a lawyer, I have been concerned. In fact the member for Ottawa South made some comments in his remarks about the Attorney General that I think are really below what a lawyer should be saying when discussing policy or law with another lawyer. It is conduct or language that is really beneath him, and in the legal profession it is called "sharp practice".

My question to the member relates to the fact that we heard in debate today that a lot of the concerns being raised today were not raised at committee. Specifically, the Liberal Party likes to quote the charter at length but does not seem to understand that the charter would provide for this law in a fulsome way. Certainly, section 1 of the charter would provide for some differences to the legal structure for military personnel who give the ultimate sacrifice.

I would like the member's comments on charter provisions specifically.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the member for Ottawa South said, but I will say that we brought up time and time again at committee the changes and the concerns we expressed today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the debate in committee, the NDP made quite a few comments.

It was important to us to participate in the debate because we wanted to stand up for military personnel and we felt that the bill was flawed. Unfortunately, during the last four hours of debate in committee, the Liberal Party said not a word.

I know that my colleague is not a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence, but why did he not convey his thoughts to the Liberal member who is on the committee? The Liberal committee member could then have shared those thoughts with the committee. Why did the Liberals have nothing to contribute to four hours of debate? Worse still, for some of the votes, no Liberal member voted.

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, what actually happened was a four-hour filibuster. There were 57 changes that were proposed, and no attention was paid to them whatsoever. To pretend in any way that there was a proper debate during this committee, over a period of four hours, is to not recognize the fact that it was one giant filibuster by the government.

[*Translation*]

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 Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

[*English*]

Some hon. members: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I declare the motion defeated on division.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

I therefore declare Motion No. 2 lost.

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (for the Minister of National Defence) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage without further amendment.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CLIMATE CHANGE

The House resumed from April 25 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the New Democratic Party motion.

Call in the members.

• (1855)

[*English*]

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

*Adjournment Proceedings**(Division No. 670)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Aubin
Ayala	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau	Caron
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Fortin	Freeman
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hughes
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mourani	Mulcair
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Raynault	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scott	Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
Stewart	Stoffer
Thibeault	Tremblay
Turnel— 89	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Andrews	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Bélanger	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Byrne	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Casey	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Coderre
Crockatt	Cuzner
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Dion	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter	Eyking

Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Foote
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goodale
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hoback
Holder	Hsu
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lauzon	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
May	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murray
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Pacetti	Paradis
Payne	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Seeback
Sgro	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Smith	
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	St-Denis
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trotter
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Valeriotte	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 180

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

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

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians have been trying for over a year now to talk some common sense into the Conservatives by using every means possible to explain how bad the employment insurance reform is for our country.

Unfortunately, the arrogance of the Conservatives knows no bounds and they do not want to budge an inch, even though the facts are staring them in the face. We are at the point where we cannot help but wonder whether this party makes and stands by bad decisions because it is incompetent or because it refuses to own up to its mistakes.

Just a few weeks ago, the papers were reporting that the budget-cutting quotas given to Service Canada inspectors were required by the department. I talked to the minister to find out why she was requiring \$430 million in EI benefits to be cut for the current fiscal year.

I also asked her why she was demanding cuts that were more than double the overpayments made in 2009, in other words \$200 million. Unfortunately, her response was far from adequate.

First, she said that the employment insurance program is there for people who are entitled to benefits, yet I need not remind members that the program is becoming less and less accessible as a result of the Conservatives' measures. As a result of the restrictions imposed, less than 50% of workers are entitled to receive EI benefits during hard times, even though all workers contribute to the program.

One has to wonder whether the Conservatives plan to restrict access to benefits to less than 10% of the population, fill the EI coffers and then make off with a bundle of cash that came exclusively from the pockets of workers and employers, as did the two previous Liberal and Conservative governments.

In her response, the minister also said that there were cheaters in the system and that Service Canada managed to stop half a billion dollars in ineligible payments.

Of course, I agree that any cheaters must be caught. However, it is completely unacceptable to use the word fraud and the amount of \$500 million in the same sentence. The Conservatives are pros at using this tactic rather than governing competently and with integrity, and unfortunately, they are once again using it to denigrate workers and scare Canadians into falsely thinking that their money is being wasted. This is nothing but demagoguery.

Employment insurance is not being defrauded of \$500 million per year. The truth is that there are overpayments of benefits and errors on the part of employers, employees and claimants. Those errors can arise because of misunderstandings, poor communication, different takes on events, computer glitches or administrative problems.

Getting back to my question: why is the minister forcing Service Canada investigators to retrieve a minimum amount of money every month if not to save money by clawing it back from honest workers who have lost their jobs and contributed to the plan?

We have a federal deficit, and this government has no idea how to get public finances back on track. That is why it is targeting honest workers and people.

Simply put, the government is making political hay at Canadian workers' expense to cover up its own mismanagement.

Can the minister provide a clear explanation of why she has imposed these quotas?

• (1900)

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance program exists to support eligible Canadians who cannot find work. Service Canada has a responsibility to find and stop inappropriate claims so that Canadians who have paid into the system can access these benefits when they need them. That is why we have an integrity function built into the system.

Service Canada's integrity services branch is responsible for investigating client error, fraud and abuse. It ensures clients receive the right benefits at the right time and for the right purpose. We have mechanisms to detect overpayments and stop any further incorrect payments.

[Translation]

In short, when we uncover errors or fraud, we put a stop to it. That means less money going out for the wrong reasons.

[English]

Although there are performance objectives to help protect the benefits of the unemployed from fraud, quotas simply do not exist. These measures should not be misconstrued as savings quotas. If these performance targets are not met, there are no negative consequences for employees.

Last year, nearly half a billion dollars in ineligible payments were detected and stopped by Service Canada across all programs. This is in large number and it illustrates just how important it is that we act on behalf of Canadians to ensure the accuracy of payments. As large as this number is, we know that the EI program still lost hundreds of millions of dollars due to overpayments and fraud that were not recovered.

These integrity mechanisms help us to ensure that we are providing a sustainable system that will continue to be available to Canadians and dependable for those who are eligible. These integrity measures are not tied to any specific region of the country. Service Canada officials have been clear that they do not have quotas which would carry negative consequences for staff who fail to meet them.

Since 1993, officials have used targets to find and stop inappropriate claims so Canadians who have paid into the system can access these benefits when they need them.

Front-line Service Canada employees and managers do not receive bonuses for meeting performance objectives.

Adjournment Proceedings

We hear constantly from the opposition members that they do not want any increase in EI premiums. If we do not stop and recover inappropriate claims, it would be Canadian employees and employers who bear the costs.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, Canadians are sick and tired of hearing the same old tune.

The minister said that quotas do not exist, yet we know full well that Service Canada employees have performance targets. We also know that these employees will be meeting with their managers at the beginning of May to find out what those targets are. The targets are cuts of \$485,000 per employee.

I am sure that Canadians would like to know how the minister knows in advance that she will have \$485 million in ineligible payments—as she so often likes to remind us—if it is not because investigators will be required to do everything in their power, unthinkable things, in order to cut unemployed workers' benefits.

Canadians do not want to be treated like criminals and nobodies. They want to be treated with dignity when they lose their jobs. Employment insurance belongs to the workers, and they should be able to have access to it when they need it.

Will the minister listen to workers and ease up on this reform, and will she get rid of these infamous quotas that she still refuses to call quotas?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the accusations that our employees have to meet reduction quotas are false. I cannot be any clearer.

[*English*]

The purpose of EI is to support those who have lost their job through no fault of their own. Service Canada has a responsibility to find and stop inappropriate claims so Canadians who have paid into the system can access these benefits when they need them. Last year, nearly half a billion dollars in ineligible payments were detected and stopped by Service Canada.

Since 1993, officials have used targets to find and stop inappropriate claims so that Canadians who have paid into the system can access these benefits when they need them.

FOOD SAFETY

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take this opportunity to revisit my question about the barriers to nutritionally adequate food faced by northern and aboriginal peoples across Canada.

As I have said before, the government must consider a national food strategy to combat the growing issue of food insecurity. At the time of my question, the UN rapporteur on the right to food finished his visit to Canada and expressed concern that we were not meeting our obligations under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which we signed in 2010, by the way. He has since delivered his report to the UN Human Rights Council with a similar message.

The inaccessibility of nutritious, culturally appropriate and sustainably developed food is a problem that disproportionately affects aboriginal and northern communities in Canada. There are a number of factors that limit one's ability to acquire this food. One of the major factors is income. We know that more than 20% of aboriginal people fall below the Statistics Canada low-income cutoff rate. By way of comparison, only 11% of the rest of our population shares this circumstance.

Therefore, we see how the factors that affect one's ability to purchase food are disproportionately felt among Canada's aboriginal population. This is reflected in the 2007-2008 Inuit health survey by the Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment, which demonstrated that 70% of adults living in Nunavut are food insecure. These are some of the highest figures among all developed nations.

These figures demonstrate that federal programs, like nutrition north Canada, which are aimed at addressing this issue, could be improved. The program's lack of transparency makes it impossible for observers to see if subsidies directed to food suppliers are actually being passed along to consumers. Ultimately, what is happening is that food costs in northern Canada continue to rise, despite a federal program designed to address the phenomenon. Nutrition north Canada also dismisses the reality that some of the best and most nutritious food consumed by aboriginal peoples is available through traditional means, hunting and fishing.

However, we have to remember that this is not an issue limited to aboriginal peoples but is increasingly faced by more and more Canadians. Since the 1980s, we have witnessed food banks become permanent fixtures across the country. What were once emergency assistance measures were used by more than three-quarters of a million Canadians in March of this year alone. Almost 40% of those were children. However, food banks have little or no government funding and are chronically understaffed. We must commend the organizations and civic-minded volunteers whose hard work is all that stands before people having to make difficult choices, like between paying rent and buying good nutritious food.

While the Conservative government does little to address the problem of food insecurity, volunteers and organizations across Canada, like the Elliot Lake food bank, continue to work hard to help Canadian families struggling with the unacceptable choices I mentioned. These organizations are a part of the solution but are not equipped to address a food crisis of this magnitude. Canada prides itself on being among the most developed nations. The government has a role to play to ensure that the most vulnerable in our population have access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

Adjournment Proceedings

The UN report on the right to food highlights some practical ways we can address the issue of food insecurity facing too many Canadians. As the report notes, we have to encourage the federal, provincial and territorial governments to meet with aboriginal groups to discuss access to land and natural resources and how this affects nutrition north Canada and the right to food.

We see far too often that people are left without food. When will the government start talking about these issues? How many more people have to go without adequate food before we start developing a national food strategy?

● (1910)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a bit of confusion. The question my colleague on the other side should be following up on deals with CFIA and food safety as opposed to food security. However, since she has raised the issue of food security, I would like to make a few comments.

A key part of food security is the actual production of food. Here in Canada, our farmers produce a high quantity of high-quality food, and we know this. Farmers feed our cities. Farmers feed Canadians. We actually over-produce a number of commodities. This member spoke about a food crisis in Canada. However, in our pork and beef sectors and in wheat, canola and soy, we over-produce in terms of domestic consumption. That is why it is so important that our government put in place free trade agreements. Those are the free trade agreements the opposition is opposed to and fights every step of the way. These free trade agreements are important, because they open foreign markets to our farmers who produce their high-quality products.

Therefore, I do not understand this member when she speaks about a food crisis here in Canada, when, in fact, we produce plenty of food to feed the people of Canada and to export to people of other nations.

The other point I want to mention is that food safety is indeed a key part of food security. I want to highlight the fact that Sylvain Charlebois, who is a well-known food safety expert, recently stated that CFIA's annual budget is far more per capita than any other industrialized nation's. I bring this up because the opposition refuses to acknowledge that food safety is part of food security. I say that because it is important to note that the opposition has voted against all our funding increases for the CFIA for food safety.

For example, in budget 2011, we committed \$100 million over five years to build science capacity and to implement inspection modernization, including enhanced training. What did the opposition members do? They voted against those measures.

As the CFIA continues to modernize its inspection approaches, it will ensure that there continues to be enough inspection staff to protect the health and safety of Canadians. In fact, since 2006, the agency's field inspection staff has increased by more than 700. That is an increase of 25%. What did the members of the opposition do? They voted against all of those resource and financial increases for the CFIA to improve food safety.

In budget 2012 we provided \$51 million over two years to the CFIA, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada to

continue their food-safety activities. Our recent budget would strengthen food safety and our government's commitment to the health and safety of Canadians.

I would ask the opposition members to recognize that food safety plays a key role in food security. I would ask them to stand in their places and vote for the types of measures our government is bringing to reinforce and improve food safety here in Canada.

● (1915)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, as members know, we speak on a variety of issues, and I have spoken on food security on a number of occasions, so obviously, I may have picked the wrong question today. Regardless, there is still a big crisis here in Canada. Whether it is with respect to CFIA or the food security piece, the fact is, as we have seen with the tainted meat, that the government is not getting the job done, and the numbers the Conservatives quote are actually false.

As we go on, whether it is with respect to food security or food safety, at the end of the day, this is a government that is not getting the job done. The Conservatives are reducing the inspections field, and they are certainly not addressing the issue with respect to Nutrition North Canada. There are many first nations people who are doing without food. Many people in our communities have to rely on food banks, and many food banks are having a difficult time keeping up with the demand.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I simply have to go back to the fact that my colleague continues to be confused. She was confused about the question she was asking tonight, and now she is confused when she says that the numbers are false, because they are not false.

In fact, I will reiterate the numbers. Since 2006, our government has hired an additional 700 inspection staff for the CFIA. That is on the CFIA website. This member is welcome to check it out.

In budget 2011, there was an additional \$100 million in federal funding for food safety activities. That is fact. It is also fact that the opposition members voted against that measure.

In budget 2012, there was an additional \$51 million for food safety activities. That is fact, and it is also a fact that the members of the opposition voted against that as well.

This member is confused, and I am glad that she recognizes that food safety is part of food security. However, she now needs to start standing with her colleagues to vote in favour of these important measures we are putting in place to improve food safety here in Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is being withdrawn.

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 7:18 p.m.)

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