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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 5, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 5, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 23(5) of the Auditor General Act, the fall 2013 report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons with an addendum on environmental petitions from January 1 to June 30, 2013.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

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PERFORMANCE REPORTS, 2012-13

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table documents in both official languages.

[*English*]

On behalf of the 92 departments and agencies, I table the performance reports for 2012-13, and I invite hon. members to access the performance reports at tbs-sct.gc.ca. Of course we have them available on members' sticks, so if they do not want the sticks, they can go online as well.

* * *

TACKLING CONTRABAND TOBACCO ACT

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in contraband tobacco).

She said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the special order made previously, I would like to inform the House that this bill is in the same form as Bill S-16 was in the previous session at the time of prorogation.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that the bill is in the same form as Bill S-16 when it was before the House at the time of prorogation of the first session of the 41st Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Consequently, pursuant to the order made Monday, October 21, 2013, the bill is deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-547, An Act to amend the Navigable Waters Protection Act (Fox Lake and other lakes and rivers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for York South—Weston for seconding my bill.

[*English*]

Today I introduce my bill to amend the Navigable Waters Protection Act to re-protect many lakes and rivers of Nickel Belt. After the government stripped protection from 98% of Canada's lakes and rivers, I received an incredible volume of mail from constituents asking that their lakes and rivers be re-protected. I have named some 34 waterways in this legislation, including Lake Wanapitei, which is a source of drinking water for the City of Greater Sudbury. We know that navigation is directly related to environmental conditions, ecosystem protection, water levels and the commercial and recreational use of water. We must protect the interests of cottagers, boaters, recreational fishers, municipalities, first nations and more.

[*Translation*]

This is not just an issue for environmentalists. If a river or lake is not protected, it means that anyone can build a bridge, set up ferry service, or create an obstruction that will affect navigation on the lake or river.

[*English*]

It is not right that all of these groups and individuals assume the onus to take a developer to court if the proposed protection affects a lake or river. My New Democrat colleagues have launched a campaign to return protection to the lakes and rivers Canadians hold dear. I am happy to include Nickel Belt lakes and rivers in that campaign.

Business of Supply

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

* * *

PETITIONS

CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition on behalf of about two dozen of my constituents expressing their strong support for the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the positive obligations that are contained in it.

SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, residents in my community of York South—Weston who endured terrible flooding last July 8, in part caused by inadequate and antiquated sewers, have signed a petition calling on the Government of Canada to immediately take steps to fund urgent infrastructure projects in order to upgrade our sewer systems and avoid future property damage.

HONEYBEES

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, today I present a petition on behalf of residents in my riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North who are concerned about the disappearance of honeybees in Canada and around the world.

The petitioners are counting upon the federal government to immediately establish a refuge zone for honeybees in northwestern Ontario, where we are free from honeybee diseases. A honeybee refuge zone in northwestern Ontario is vital to the preservation of one of the last healthy populations of honeybees left in the world.

LYME DISEASE

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

The first petition is from residents of Maple Ridge, B.C., as well as Oakville and Toronto, in Ontario. I am very grateful to the petitioners. They have collected petitioners' signatures to support my private member's bill, Bill C-442, calling for a national Lyme disease strategy. I hear from Canadians every single day who are suffering from this terrible disease. It is a non-partisan issue, and I hope the bill will be passed.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, in Saanichton and Sidney, and also from people in Tofino.

The petitioners are calling upon this House to put together a full national climate strategy to reduce by 80%, by 2050, our emissions of greenhouse gases.

* * *

● (1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—INSTRUCTION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

He said: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday was Hallowe'en, and pumpkins across Canada were carved with the haunting letters "PMO": hardly a compliment. On Friday, there were jokes making the rounds that only the drug debacle consuming Toronto mayor Rob Ford, the Prime Minister's friend, could take the current federal government's ethics scandal off the front pages of the newspapers.

The Conservatives had a convention in Calgary over the weekend, and the dominant news was not any matter of government policy; it was all about the intrigue surrounding a mysterious \$90,000 payment and other chicanery to buy the silence and complicity of a disgraced senator. On and on it goes. The government's self-inflicted crisis has made it a target for national questioning and even national ridicule.

The motion we have put before the House today is intended to help Canadians get the basic respect they deserve by providing a forum within which they can have their many serious questions asked and answered authoritatively about what went so terribly wrong with Senator Mike Duffy, and how the Prime Minister and his office got so deeply implicated. Interrogations in the daily question period are obviously useful, but they can only go so far. In the limited time available, question period cannot do much more than identify the basic headline issues, and the government's responses in 35 seconds are bound to be a bit superficial at best. That is compounded by an obvious government strategy to "deny, deny, deny", as Colin Thatcher once said, stonewalling any reasonable access to information.

Business of Supply

However, denial, deflection and obfuscation do not diminish the public's thirst for a complete and honest explanation of what transpired in the Conservative ethics scandal, or the public's absolute right to get such an explanation. The Prime Minister, of course, is the central player. He either appointed or hired every one of the people involved in this scandal. They were carrying out his orders to make the Duffy problem go away. The Prime Minister enabled them, he empowered them and they were accountable to him for what they did and how they did it. He, in turn, is accountable for them to all Canadians.

That point was made emphatically by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, then the government House leader, on August 27, 2010, when a parliamentary committee wanted to interrogate a ministerial staff member about his interference in an access to information proceeding. The minister blocked the employee from answering any questions, relying on the principle of ministerial responsibility. In *The Globe and Mail*, on behalf of the government, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs who was then the government House leader said this:

The fundamental constitutional principle of responsible government, which is integral to the supremacy of Parliament, provides that ministers are the ones accountable to Parliament, not members of their staff...

Therefore, in the government's own words, it is not appropriate, indeed it is a violation of parliamentary democracy, for the Prime Minister to blame his staff for this scandal or to shift responsibility onto employees or others.

When the Prime Minister brutally trashed Nigel Wright in this House last week, when he suggested that Wright and Wright alone was responsible for all the deceit and corruption, he was flatly wrong. The buck stops at the PM, not the PMO. It is the Prime Minister who must answer fully and completely to Canadians. To fail to do so shows utter contempt for the people of this country, who have the right to know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

●(1015)

Providing for the Prime Minister to have his day under oath in the court of public opinion will give him an unparalleled opportunity to set the record straight; no more unanswered rants from Mike Duffy, no more speculation by the opposition, no more meddling by the media. The Prime Minister would have an unfiltered occasion to speak directly to Canadians, to tell them what they need to know in the most credible way possible, under oath. That is why the motion is being presented today.

If Canadians were the ones to be asking the questions, what would they want to know? They might start with the Prime Minister's frame of mind. Last week in Calgary, why did he go so far out of his way to set up an "us versus them" conflict scenario, which depicted anyone who was not a sycophantic Conservative ideologue as an opponent to be vilified? "I couldn't care less what those opponents think", he shouted into the microphone. Add them up. Those opponents constitute a very large majority of Canadians. The Prime Minister owes them all an explanation. What did he mean when he told them he could not care less?

Does he comprehend that all those Canadians for whom he could not care less know full well that there are two distinct sides to this

scandal? On one side, there is the bad behaviour of certain senators run amok. It is interesting to note that last May, as this scandal was developing in the public arena, it was the Liberals who prevented the quick sweep-under-the-rug scheme that the government was attempting back in May. We forced a debate in the Senate about the audits. We unwound the government's whitewash. We called for all of the files to go to the RCMP and we demanded consequences for those who had broken the rules. That was back in May. That is the one side of the scandal and that is where the government would want the public's focus to begin and end.

However, on the other side, there is the PMO and the Prime Minister's senior entourage, all those people who were so intensely involved in covering up the embarrassment to the government caused by its highest profile senators getting into such deep trouble. It is the cover-up that converted Mike Duffy's scandal into the Prime Minister's scandal. Indeed, the cover-up is likely the larger problem because it raises the question of what sort of operating mentality was dominating the PMO on the Prime Minister's watch that led Nigel Wright and so many others to think that a \$90,000 payment to a sitting parliamentarian would somehow be okay.

In that regard, here is a sampling of just some of the questions that the Prime Minister needs to answer for Canadians. Before he appointed Mike Duffy to the Senate, what kind of a background check was done? Did he read it? Did the Prime Minister know that Mr. Duffy was a resident of Ottawa and not a resident of Prince Edward Island? Was he eligible to be appointed as a senator representing P.E.I.?

When did the Prime Minister first become aware that Mike Duffy had accumulating problems with his travel and living costs? How long before Nigel Wright summoned Duffy to a meeting in the PMO on February 11? On February 13, when the Prime Minister says he ordered Duffy to repay his expenses, what instructions did he give to Nigel Wright or anyone else to ensure that his orders to Mr. Duffy were in fact carried out properly? In the next three months, from Prime Minister February until mid-May, is it conceivable that he was never briefed by his staff about the biggest political problem that was then dogging the government or that he never asked a single question about how his orders on February 13 were being executed?

●(1020)

During that period, from February 13 until May 15, \$90,000 was paid to Senator Duffy. Another \$13,560 was paid to Duffy's lawyers to cover unspecified legal costs. The course of a forensic audit being conducted by Deloitte was seriously impeded. A Senate report about Mr. Duffy was edited, watered down and whitewashed to go easy on him.

Business of Supply

He claims he was threatened and subject to extortion. He also says there was an elaborate communications plan to portray him as an honourable man, showing leadership by taking out a home mortgage to cover the \$90,000 himself, which was patently untrue. He says he was specifically coached by the PMO to lie to Canadians about that mortgage scam.

All of this was going on in the PMO right under the Prime Minister's nose for three full months, from February to May, and the Prime Minister never noticed a thing. Did no one tell him? Did he not ask?

Canadians want to know how that is possible. They also want to know who was involved in this conspiracy. The Prime Minister says he found out on May 15 that the cash for Duffy came from Nigel Wright. He has repeatedly claimed that no one else knew anything or did anything. It was Wright and Wright alone. He was the sole architect of this deception.

However, that is clearly not true. Police documents show others were involved. Media reports have disclosed others still. It is a long list: Duffy; Wright; Senator Gerstein, now by his own admission; lawyers Perrin and Hamilton, maybe more; Chris Woodcock, the Prime Minister's director of issues management who got a detailed email from Duffy outlining the anatomy of the cover-up deal, including possible illegal behaviour in and around the PMO; senior staffers Byrne, Rogers, Novak and van Hemmen; Senators LeBreton, Tkachuk and Stewart Olsen; and on and on it goes.

As the Prime Minister's entire inner sanctum gets implicated, how is it credible that none of these folks breathed a word to the Prime Minister over a period of three full months? His chief of staff, his lawyer, his chief fundraiser; they had a duty to warn their boss that potentially illegal scheming was going on in his office. More to the point, they had a duty to Canada to stop it.

Here is another contradiction. Starting on May 15 when the media disclosed and the Prime Minister had to concede that Nigel Wright had given Duffy the cash to repay his expenses, the Prime Minister described Mr. Wright as an honourable man trying to protect taxpayers, trying to help out a dear old friend. He said that Mr. Wright continued to have his complete confidence.

Then five days later, he was gone, thrown under the bus with Duffy and all the rest. What did the Prime Minister learn in those five days, from the Wednesday to the Sunday, that totally changed his characterization of Mr. Wright? Why has that characterization continued to worsen over the summer and into the fall to the point that the Prime Minister so vilified Mr. Wright last week?

In the search for someone to pay the \$90,000, what negotiations took place between Nigel Wright, Senator Gerstein and lawyer Arthur Hamilton? Did the Conservative Party say no as a matter of principle, or did it just say no when the cost rose above \$30,000 and up to \$90,000?

What is the party payment of \$13,560 in legal fees really for? Can the Prime Minister or the government produce an itemized invoice from Duffy's lawyers to prove that this party cash had nothing to do with the \$90,000 in hush money? If Duffy's lawyers obtained that \$13,000 by false pretences, by saying it was in relation to something that it was not, will legal action be taken to get the money back?

What were the conversations between Wright and Duffy and various other senators about interfering with Deloitte's forensic audit and whitewashing a Senate report? Who gave those orders? Who carried them out? Who in the PMO instructed Mike Duffy to lie on national television about getting a mortgage?

Furthermore, where is the paper trail?

• (1025)

In answer to access to information requests and Order Paper questions, the government has said, incredibly but repeatedly, that there is not a single shred of paper, not an email, not a note, not a message written on a napkin, anywhere in the PMO or anywhere in the government that relates to Duffy or the Prime Minister's scandal.

However, Duffy has paper. PMO leakers have paper. The police have a lot of paper, and they are looking for more.

How is it that all that documentation somehow mysteriously vanished? Is it stored somewhere? Has any of it been destroyed inadvertently?

This raises a serious question for the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Deputy Minister of Justice. What have they done and what do they continue to do to protect the integrity of the Government of Canada through this whole sordid and tragic affair?

The central actor, of course, remains the Prime Minister. He has the ultimate authority and accountability. None of that can be delegated to subordinates, not to Nigel Wright or anyone else, to assume full responsibility. Only the Prime Minister can answer. The Prime Minister needs to look Canadians in the eye and tell them fully what happened.

Accordingly, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is rather funny to hear this member talk about things being written on a napkin. Of course, we remember his leader who sold a golf course by using a napkin at a restaurant and then used government money to do that, but I do not want to digress too far.

We have been listening in this chamber for a number of months. We have been having extraordinary debate back and forth. We have seen the Leader of the Opposition ask a lot of very good quality questions. There has been vigorous debate, but the one thing we have all noticed is that the Liberal leader does not seem to want to participate in that debate. What is becoming quite clear, I think even to members of the Liberal Party, is just how in over his head the Liberal leader is.

Business of Supply

We have great actors in the House. The member for Jeanne-Le Ber I will say was a spectacular actor in the movie *300*. That is a good actor, a great performance, but what is quite clear is that a drama teacher trying to act like a leader is just not working out for the Liberals. He is not acting great.

What the motion does is that it really is an admission by the Liberals that their leader is of no use to them in the House, so they want one member on the ethics committee to do all of the work that their leader has been so abysmal at in the House.

My question to the member is this. Is he that embarrassed by his leader and his inability to perform in the House that he now wants to shift it over to the member for Avalon? Has he now become the new leader of the Liberal Party when it comes to this topic?

• (1030)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, no amount of clown acting is going to change the topic. No number of slurs directed against the teaching profession is going to change the topic or change the channel.

The fact of the matter is that the Liberal caucus and the Liberal leader have pursued this issue every step of the way as it has unfolded so tragically before Canadians over the course of the last number of months.

I would also note that the reason the exposure to the country has been as ample as it has been is largely because of the work of Senator Cowan and others in the Liberal caucus in the Senate who refused to get snookered by the Conservatives who wanted this whole issue dealt with, without debate, by unanimous consent, back on about May 9. They wanted to sweep it all under the carpet. “Let’s just pass a motion absolving everybody of everything, get over it and move on”.

If it had not been for the strength of the Liberal caucus in the Senate, which made sure that there was debate, which made sure that the facts got on the table, which made sure that the cover-up was unwound, in fact there would not be the degree of disclosure that we have today. Ever since then, in both the Senate and in the House, Liberals have prosecuted this aggressively and will continue to do so.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we, the official opposition, would certainly like to hear from the Prime Minister, under oath, along with Senator Duffy, Senator Wallin, and Senator Brazeau.

However, I want the Liberal member to know that I am not clowning around. I would also like to hear from former Senator Mac Harb, who abruptly resigned to avoid answering questions; former Liberal Senator Raymond Lavigne, who is in jail; and former Liberal Senator Andy Thompson, who is God knows where. I would like to know if the Liberals would bring them to committee, under oath, to tell us about their scheming to defraud Canadian taxpayers.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is entitled to propose whatever motions he likes, and the House will deal with and dispose of them.

This motion puts a precise focus on the major issue before the country right now, and that is the question of how Senator Duffy got

so badly into disgrace and how and to what extent and by what means the Prime Minister and his office were involved.

That is the question we wish to see put before the ethics committee. If others wish to make other proposals, let them do it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague from Wascana on his speech and on all his efforts throughout this scandal to clarify this situation and get some answers from the government and the Prime Minister. It is unfortunate that the Prime Minister often does not want to answer questions. However, I congratulate my colleague on his excellent work on this issue.

My question is rather simple. For the past few days, we have seen some of the questions that have arisen from the statements or affidavits the RCMP has filed in court regarding the involvement of the Prime Minister’s Office—probably Mr. Woodcock, who is now the chief of staff for the Minister of Natural Resources—in inventing a scenario or scheme to cover up money in the PMO, specifically the money that Mr. Wright gave to Senator Duffy, and inventing stories involving a line of credit for Mr. Duffy’s house and claims that he borrowed the money from the Royal Bank.

Clearly, the police documents reveal that that was not true, and furthermore, that the Prime Minister’s Office had advised a parliamentarian to lie. It is really disturbing that senior officials in the office of the Prime Minister of Canada would take the time to send emails instructing a parliamentarian to go on television and lie to the Canadian public about an issue as complex and important as the integrity of the Prime Minister’s Office and the Prime Minister himself.

I wonder if my colleague has any thoughts he could share on that.

• (1035)

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, that is a core question that remains unanswered by the government. It is a stunning allegation by Senator Duffy. According to news reports, it is now the subject of a more focused kind of investigation by the police.

On at least two occasions, maybe more, I have asked that very question of the government in the House and have gotten absolutely no answer. What about this suggestion that somebody in the Prime Minister’s Office counselled a sitting parliamentarian to lie to Canadians about a key fact in this whole sordid affair?

What makes it so serious is that the Prime Minister said that he took comfort that everything was being properly handled when he saw Senator Duffy on television saying that he had taken out a mortgage to pay his own expenses. Then we discover that it is alleged that Senator Duffy was lying on the instructions of the Prime Minister’s very own office. That is the kind of damning thing that needs to be answered, and the answer can only come from the Prime Minister looking Canadians in the eye.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the Liberal Party raises this issue. We all remember the Gomery scandal and the \$40 million we are still looking for.

Business of Supply

The member for Wascana may recall an exchange with Judy Wasylycia-Leis during the previous election, when there were some serious allegations and an RCMP investigation.

There are so many issues facing the world today. There is the Syria crisis, the crisis in Egypt, and issues in Southeast Asia and throughout Africa. In Canada, there are issues in health care and aboriginal issues we need to work together as a Parliament to get through.

I wonder if the member could rank issues such as health care, the environment, and the economy in order of importance to him, relative to the Senate.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, first, in relation to the two specific cases the hon. gentleman referred to, in one case, there was a royal commission, and in the other case, there was a police investigation, both of which completely vindicated the position I had taken, by 100%.

Second, all the issues he referred to in terms of health, economic development, and the well-being of Canadians are crucially important issues, and they need to have the time and attention of this House.

It is also fundamentally important, and more important than anything else, that Canadians are able to trust the integrity of their Prime Minister. That is the issue that has to be dealt with first and foremost.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have obviously been spending a lot of time on this here in the House of Commons. As I said in my opening question to the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, it seems that we have come to a point where the Liberals themselves are in agreement with the fact that their leader is in way over his head.

Last week we were in the House, and the Liberals were accusing the NDP of bringing forward a silly motion that showed how amateur the NDP was and so on and so forth. Now we have the Liberal Party basically admitting to Canadians that the new leader of the Liberal Party will be the member for Avalon. He is the person they trust more than their own leader to get to the bottom of issues.

Where are we with respect to the Senate? It is important that we look back and see where we are and what has happened.

On February 13, as I have said in the House on a number of occasions, Senator Duffy approached the Prime Minister to try to justify his inappropriate expenses. He approached the Prime Minister, who was very clear: if Senator Duffy had inappropriate expenses or expenses that he did not earn, he had to pay those back. The Prime Minister was very clear.

I do not think any of us, at least on this side of the House, would disagree with that statement. If someone has accepted a payment that he or she is not entitled to, it must be paid back.

The Prime Minister made quite clear to all of us, in a caucus meeting with senators and members of Parliament in attendance, the standard he expected from members of Parliament and each of us who is entrusted with taxpayers' money. He told all of us that if members have something inappropriate, they had better make it

right. If they do not, they cannot expect their caucus to stand up for them. At the conclusion of that meeting, as I have said, Senator Duffy approached the Prime Minister to try to justify those expenses. The Prime Minister was very clear that he had to repay those expenses.

We then learned, along with all Canadians and all members of the House, that Senator Duffy had taken out a mortgage or a loan from the Royal Bank of Canada on one of his homes, and with that loan, he paid back the expenses. That is what we were told. Obviously, that was not true. There is no disputing the fact that Senator Duffy, at this point, had not paid back a penny of the inappropriate expenses he accepted.

We learned subsequently, when it was reported on May 15, that Nigel Wright had, in fact, repaid Senator Duffy's expenses. Nigel Wright, of course, understands that it was inappropriate. Nigel Wright is prepared to accept the consequences of that decision. Nigel Wright, as far as we understand, is working with the authorities in providing whatever information they ask for. We also subsequently learned that there were other individuals whom Mr. Wright had brought into his confidence with respect to his repayment of Senator Duffy's expenses. That was, of course, addressed by the Prime Minister in the summer.

Let us talk a bit further about what has been happening in the House for a number of months, because that is really at the heart of what this Liberal motion is all about. Since this came out, we have had the audit. Canadians I have spoken to, the ones who are contacting my office, want to learn more about how the Senate operates. They understand that there are two houses of Parliament, but they do not always appreciate the independence the Senate has with respect to the House of Commons. They understand that we have certain rules we follow over here with respect to how we submit and receive our expenses, but they do not understand how this was able to go on in the Senate for so long, and they want accountability.

Canadians also know that one of the ways they can extract accountability from their members of Parliament is by throwing them out of office at the time of the next election. It frustrates them that they do not have that exact same ability with senators. It frustrates them that there is no way to remove a senator from office until that senator reaches the age of 75.

● (1040)

The member opposite, from the NDP caucus, asked a question in which he talked about former Liberal senator Andy Thompson. Canadians remember this. Here was a Liberal senator, the former leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, who I think was appointed in 1967, I suppose by Pierre Trudeau or by Lester Pearson. I assume it was Pierre Trudeau, because it was late 1967.

Business of Supply

By 1997 people were wondering who the heck this senator was. People started to look into it. He appeared once or twice a session to collect his paycheque, but then he was gone. We subsequently found that the senator had actually been living in Mexico. However, for years he still collected a paycheque from the people of Canada as a senator. It never dawned on the Liberal Party that that was somehow inappropriate for the taxpayers of Canada to be paying for a senator to live in Mexico, come up to Canada, show his face in the Senate once or twice a session, collect his paycheque, collect credits toward his pension, and in no way participate in any of the debates that were so important to Canadians at that time.

Debates such as those on the GST and free trade were very important, and so was the repatriation of the constitution. This senator did not participate in any of it, because he was busy tanning in Mexico. No one in the Liberal Party ever thought that was a problem and they had better do something about it until members of the Reform Party at the time brought this out and asked how appropriate it was. Then all of a sudden the Liberals decided he needed to be removed from the Senate, his salary stripped, and so on. Thirty years later, they finally got around to it.

Canadians also remember, sadly, Senator Raymond Lavigne. This was brought up by my NDP colleague, the member for Nickel Belt. Senator Lavigne, if I recall correctly, was having one of his assistants clean his cottage and chop down some trees. He was getting paid to do that. Senator Lavigne was on the public payroll for years while he was going to court, where he was subsequently found guilty.

Canadians look at this and say they cannot throw them out through an election. When they abuse their expenses, unlike the case in the private sector, where they would be fired, in the Senate they are told not to show up for work. They keep all of their privileges, continue to get paid, and receive credits toward their pension. Canadians know that is unacceptable and, rightly, it frustrates them.

The same goes for these senators right now, Senators Brazeau, Wallin, and Duffy, and recently retired and disgraced Liberal Senator Mac Harb. Here is another case. Mac Harb is a former Liberal member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre. He lived in Ottawa, became a senator for Ottawa, but then found a way to manipulate the rules so that he could claim a housing allowance by buying a home 120 kilometres away from Ottawa, just outside the area, and then pretending to live there. He collected an allowance, year after year, as someone living away from Ottawa.

We all have the opportunity in this place to decide where our principal residence will be. There are a lot of members who, for travel reasons or because they are cabinet ministers or for whatever reason, choose to declare that their principal residence will be in Ottawa, even though they have a home elsewhere. My principal residence is in Stouffville. I declare that as my principal residence when I am asked. However, other members who are here more often and perhaps have extraordinary flight challenges getting back and forth may decide to make their residence here. We understand what that means in relation to our expenses. It is not a confusion to any of us, so it should not be a confusion to the senators either.

• (1045)

As we have been saying right from the beginning, just because somebody can figure out a way to abuse the system and then try to

go back and say, “Well, the rules are the rules, and I was able to figure out a way around them” does not mean that the person should be protected. As the Prime Minister said, it is not only about following the letter of the law, it is about following the spirit of the law.

The vast majority of us in this place, on both sides of the House, have never violated that trust. We understand it. We get it.

We know that there were some members of the Liberal Party who did not quite get it. I think two of its sitting members abused that trust. I hope that they have subsequently paid the money back. I am not sure. I have never seen any copies of cheques showing they have repaid the hundreds of thousands of dollars in residence claims to which they were not entitled.

However, I will take them at their word. If they say they have paid it back, I guess they did, although I have not seen any copies of the cheques suggesting that they have.

However, that does not make it right. Just because someone can figure out a way around the rules does not make it right.

What are Canadians asking? They are saying they understand there are challenges and they are asking us to make it right, so they want us to look at the Senate and find ways that we can reform it. As a result, we have a package of reforms that we have put forward to the Supreme Court of Canada to find out ways in which we can actually reform the Senate.

Canadians have also been clear that they do not want to get into a big, long-drawn-out constitutional battle. They do not want us fighting with our provincial partners regarding the Senate. One of the things that Canadians have most talked about as well is how well the provinces and the federal government have worked together during the great recession to benefit the Canadian people. They do not want to turn back the pages to a time when the federal government was fighting with the provincial governments on everything. However, they do want change.

We have asked the Supreme Court of Canada to help us, to give us a road map to show us how we can change the Senate so that it better reflects Canadian values of the 21st century in order that Canadians can once again be proud of that institution, but in such a way that Canadians can be consulted so that there are term limits for these senators and so that Canadians' voices with respect to accountability can be heard. We are waiting for the Supreme Court to give us that advice so that we can bring it forward and make some changes.

What we said in our throne speech is that if we cannot change it, then it has to be abolished. I think it is quite clear that Canadians will no longer tolerate a Senate that has zero accountability.

Business of Supply

In relation to this motion, I get to answer a lot of questions in question period. I know that often my colleagues on the NDP benches are not happy with how I answer the questions, and that is fine. I get it. I understand. I am not always happy with the way they ask the question and they are not happy with the way I answer the question, but at least they actually ask questions on something that they think is important. Their leader gets up in the House and asks those questions. I might not like it and I might want to talk about other things. I think it is important we talk about other things, such as the economy, and I think it is important we talk about health care, trade, and natural resources, as was already mentioned. I think these are also very important things we should talk about.

However, this issue is obviously important to the members of the official opposition. This is a priority for them. They are asking those questions, and we are obliged to answer them.

However, they do it from the floor of the House of Commons, unlike the third party, which has clearly been left leaderless. The Liberals have clearly been left embarrassed by their own leader's inability to do anything of any significance or importance within this House of Commons.

The Liberals could start by having their leader's stage handlers pull out a copy of *Hansard* from May so that he could be brought back up to speed on what we have been talking about since then, as opposed to turning over the reins to the new or presumptive Liberal leader, the member for Avalon, and telling the member for Avalon that it is now his responsibility to do the job because the Liberal leader has so miserably failed in his duties.

• (1050)

What do they want? This is something that at least one opposition has been seized with. The Liberals have tried in their silly way to gain some traction, but it has been quite clear that when it comes to this issue, the leader of the NDP has taken the spotlight, and it is killing the Liberal leader. It is killing the Liberal leader that somebody has stolen his spotlight. What is more evident is just how irrelevant the Liberals have become on matters of any importance to the Canadian people. They are completely irrelevant.

The Liberal leader was elected in April and was going to bring so much hope to the Liberal Party. Liberals waited and waited and waited. Canadians waited with bated breath. Then, how was his first policy formulated? He was having a dinner party at his house with his friends and maybe his advisers; I do not know. They pulled out a joint and started talking about things, and the idea that maybe they should legalize marijuana came up. Now, there was a good policy.

The member for Richmond Hill told me he has a lot of dinner parties at his house. He said that usually people bring wine and they share a bottle of wine, but nobody has ever pulled out a joint and formulated policy on it. Liberals waited and waited and waited, and is that what he had?

Now he is saying he does not have what it takes in the House of Commons, so he is going to cede everything over to the member for Avalon, three hours in front of a committee is enough, and it will be put to bed.

I know why the Liberals want to do this. As we are learning today, the Liberal leader is actually instructing his senators to abstain from

voting on these motions. He is actually telling them to abstain. It is being reported in the media, the same media that the Liberals have believed 100% of the time throughout this controversy. They do not care about any of the facts, but if something is reported by a certain person, it has to be true. That same person is now reporting that the Liberal leader has instructed his senators to abstain from voting on this matter.

As the member for Trinity—Spadina just said, the Liberals have lots of practice in abstaining. They do. It is very rare that Liberals will ever come forward with any options.

We have heard this before. I remember that when I was a bit younger, the Liberals said in 1993 that they were going to get rid of the GST and get rid of free trade. Well, the GST and free trade are still here, and then they tried to take credit for how the economy grew because of free trade.

One of the reasons I got involved in politics was that I remembered the debates between John Turner and Brian Mulroney on the free trade issue. I remember those debates. Former prime minister Turner, who was also the leader of the opposition, was passionate every day in the House about what he believed, and he fought for those beliefs. Ultimately, was he wrong? Yes, he was wrong, but he had a belief and he fought for it day in and day out. He stood in this place and fought for it.

I know all members in the House would agree with me that they cannot even begin to imagine that same level of debate from the current Liberal leader, who thinks it is more important to smile for a camera than to be in this place every single day and debate the issues that are important to Canadians.

No matter where we fall on this issue, we cannot help but see it as a desperate attempt by the Liberals to steal some of the spotlight away from the NDP and to do their best to make sure their leader never has to speak on this issue, because he has nothing to say. Other than protecting the status quo, they are terrified that he might actually speak on any substantive issue, anything of importance, because what he says changes from area to area. Unless his stage handlers have put something right in front of him, Liberals are terrified, so they have now told the member for Avalon that he is the new presumptive leader of the Liberal Party. He is the person Liberals trust on this issue. He has three hours to get it done and not do anything to upset the status quo in the Senate.

• (1055)

I think Canadians understand that. When it comes to fighting the status quo in the Senate, there are some people they can trust, and it is certainly not the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not trust the Conservative Party with the Senate either. The member for Oak Ridges—Markham on October 25, stood in the House and said, “we have been very clear since we were elected in this place that we do not want to appoint senators”. That would be news to most Canadians in the fact that Mike Duffy, Patrick Brazeau, Pam Wallin, Fabian Manning, Larry Smith, Joséé Verner were all appointed by the Prime Minister.

The member mentioned the debate that happened in the eighties between Brian Mulroney and the Liberal leader, and I remember it well too. Basically the Conservative leader at the time said, “You had an option, sir, about patronage appointments”. Now we are three decades later and we still have the same patronage appointments going on.

The Prime Minister for years said that he wanted to reform the Senate. The Prime Minister had the minimum option in terms of reform of not making patronage appointments to the Senate, but instead he chose to do like Liberal and Conservative governments of the past.

Does the member agree that the 50 people who his Prime Minister appointed should be there, or does he stand by his statement that he made October 25, saying that the Conservatives should not appoint senators?

• (1100)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, of course I do not think we should be appointing senators. When I was asked that question, I made it quite clear that we would rather elect senators. We do not want to appoint senators.

In fact, it is the Prime Minister who has actually appointed elected senators and they are sitting there right now. Alberta has a model where it approached the people who identified the people they wanted to be senators and the Prime Minister then appointed those people to the Senate. That is what we want to do. We want to have an elected Senate. We want to put term limits in place.

I stand by those comments because it is important. Canadians have said this. The ones I am speaking to said that they wanted accountability in the Senate and one of the first steps should be, once we were beyond this, was to ensure that we had a voice in who represented us in the Senate.

I disagree with one thing the NDP says on this. I do support a Senate that works better, of which Canadians can be proud. I want them to be elected. I want there to be term limits, but if we cannot get to that point, then it should be abolished.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary's address. I am a member of Parliament whose principal residence is in Prince Edward Island. The people of Prince Edward Island were inflamed over the appointment of someone from Kanata to a Prince Edward Island Senate seat. Subsequently they are embarrassed and with the cover-up, they are ashamed that Prince Edward Island is repeatedly in the news and that there is this big cover-up in the Prime Minister's Office.

It struck me in the course of listening to the speech, a great scholar in the House said one day said, “when you throw mud, you lose ground”. Our leader has repeatedly said that while they focus on him, he will focus on Canadians. What Canadians want to know is the truth.

Much of the speech was spent attacking Liberals. I wonder if someone around the parliamentary secretary would be so kind as to pass him a copy of the motion we are debating today. I would ask him to answer this question. Just exactly what is the problem with having the Prime Minister come before committee and testify under oath? Canadians want the truth. Why should they be denied it?

Business of Supply

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I referenced Liberals in my remarks because it is a Liberal motion that we are talking about. Last week when we were talking about an NDP motion, I referenced the NDP and I pointed out some contradictions that it had and why I disagreed with that motion.

Now the Liberals do not want to be talked about with their own motion before the chamber. They do not want us talking about them. They are so embarrassed by their performance that they want to fight for the status quo and that they do not even want us to mention Liberals anymore. Is this what it has come to for the Liberal Party? The Liberals are so embarrassed of their leadership and their inability to actually have a voice on anything that matters to Canadians. They are so embarrassed by the fact that their only policy is to legalize marijuana. Now they do not want us to talk about them in the context of a motion they brought in front of the House.

If the Liberals believe in the motion, do not be surprised when we talk about it, the Liberal Party and the Liberal inconsistencies. If they did not want that, they could have brought a motion about the economy, about health care, but they are fighting the status quo and now their leader is telling senators to abstain, do not take a position at all on anything because that would be dangerous. I think Canadians understand where accountability will come from and it is from this side.

• (1105)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I hate to disagree with the hon. parliamentary secretary, but the Liberal leader has taken many solid positions since he became leader. Most of them are absolutely terrible. He supports the Keystone pipeline. He supported the sale to Nexen. He supports more deals with China. The only policy he has taken, with which I agree, is the one people keep vilifying him for.

I want to put this motion in context. This is about behaviour in the Prime Minister's Office. It is not about the generalized problem of the Senate. I put this for my friend, the hon. parliamentary secretary. In today's *Globe and Mail*, one of his former colleagues, Inky Mark, describes the Prime Minister's modus operandi. He said:

[The Prime Minister's] biggest weakness is that he doesn't listen to anyone. He thought he knew more than all of us put together. He didn't trust anyone. He operated through his bullies.

I ask the hon. parliamentary secretary this. How do we give the Prime Minister's reputation for being in total control of all aspects of his operations at all times with what must have only been wilful blindness to what was going on all around him in the cover-up?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I hate to disagree with the Green Party member, but the Liberal leader supports Keystone when he is in front of oil people, but he does not necessarily support it when he is in B.C. or Ontario.

We have seen this with the Liberals before. We remember the former Liberal leader who supported the auto sector when he was in Oshawa, but when he was in British Columbia, he was not so supportive of the auto sector.

Business of Supply

The Liberal leader supports the oil sands, but not taking it out of the ground. Anybody can support it, but if they do not support the pipelines that get it to market, what is the point to that? I am not sure the Liberal leader has figured out that the pipes we are talking about are not the ones used for smoking. They are the ones that actually deliver oil to the market.

With respect to the Prime Minister, he has been very clear. Had he known that this scheme was being hatched, he would have in no way endorsed such a scheme. Nigel Wright has accepted full and sole responsibility.

What we are asking for now is that the senators do the same. They are not, so there is a motion in front of the Senate which would give Canadians the accountability that they cannot extract from a ballot box when it comes to the senators.

We are learning now that the Liberals are going to sit on their hands and abstain from voting. When it comes to accountability, Canadians can always count on the Conservative Party to provide that accountability.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my riding people are concerned about jobs and economic growth. They are concerned about providing for their families. They are concerned about safety in their communities.

Just yesterday the opposition focused on one issue for 23 questions straight. It turns out the Leader of the Opposition has a confirmed history for libel, so perhaps it should not be a surprise that we are talking about innuendo and out-of-context statements and half-truths.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary a question. Why does the opposition not want to talk about Canada's economic performance? Why does it not want to talk about the Speech from the Throne? Why does it not want to talk about the Canadian-European trade agreement? Why does the opposition avoid all of the issues that concern my constituents?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right. There are so many very important issues facing Canadians.

We understand that the economy grew by a little over 2% annually. That is really good news. We have a new trade deal with the European Union that the Prime Minister was able to negotiate, opening up a market of 500 million people, which will be an incredible benefit to the people of Kitchener, I might add.

Canadians want to talk about other things. The Minister of Justice has said that we will come forward with more protections for victims of crime. We have infrastructure issues. We have issues with respect to the environment and natural resources that we have to get at.

That is not to say that this issue with respect to bringing accountability in the Senate is not important because it is. It is important and we are going to move forward with accountability and reforming the Senate, but there are a lot of other issues that we need to deal with.

The member for Kitchener Centre is completely right in identifying all of those other very important issues.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always it is an incredible honour to rise in the House as the elected member for the great region of Timmins—James Bay.

It is November 5 and I was thinking of the children's poem that is said all over England today, "Remember, remember, the fifth of November". That is the Guy Fawkes plot where a group of rebels attempted to blow up the House of Commons. Coming from a Scottish Catholic background, our family never had much reason to celebrate the Guy Fawkes plot with all of the burnings. However, I thought of it because people will look back at this period as a time when the so-called august chamber of sober second thought was blown up under its own hubris and corruption. What poems will the children speak in future? Will they remember Guy Fawkes or will they remember Nigel Wright, Pamela Wallin, Patrick Brazeau, Mac Harb or the current Prime Minister?

I want to speak to the motion and the issues we see. Right now there is a legitimization crisis in the country toward Parliament and the Senate because of this corruption scandal. Canadians need answers. At the outset, the New Democrats would support any effort to get answers regarding this scandal. However, I have a number of questions about the Liberal motion to bring the Prime Minister to committee for a three hour period to speak. I do not think that is very well thought out because there are many people we need to hear from. If we were to set up a proper inquiry, there are a number of people we would bring to committee, such as Chris Woodcock, Benjamin Perrin, Mr. van Hemmen, Irving Gerstein and Nigel Wright.

I do not agree with the idea of the Prime Minister coming to committee for three hours. Last week he was in the House for at least three hours during question period. That is the moment when we are to confront the Prime Minister. This is the tradition of the Westminster system. There is an honour system. Much of our tradition has been undermined by the present Prime Minister. However, when the leader of a party stands up to speak, it is the honour and tradition that the Prime Minister responds to the leader of that party. Therefore, the leaders of the parties have enormous opportunities in the House.

Last week, the Liberal leader fronted the idea of the Prime Minister speaking under oath somewhere. It seemed to take the Liberals a few days to figure out where this oath-taking would take place. However, I would remind the people back home that when ministers speak in the House, it is expected that they tell the truth. They may prevaricate, deny or skirt around the issue but there is a legal obligation. If someone knowingly misrepresents the facts, that is a breach of privilege for the members of the House. The Prime Minister has been walking a tightrope because he and his staff are facing many serious allegations. Therefore, this is the forum in which it should be done.

It is the leader of the Liberal Party who should be calling out the Prime Minister if he is being called out individually and not with all of his support staff or anyone else. It is the leader of a party who should be doing that. However, I have not seen the involvement of the Liberal leader anywhere with respect to this issue.

Business of Supply

Last week the Liberal leader had 45 opportunities to ask questions on this issue. That is the power of the leader of the third party. He asked three questions. Therefore, it is surprising that it has suddenly become a serious issue for him. He skipped town. He was in Calgary glad-handing with the oil executives, while the nation was facing one of the biggest political scandals. The week before that he skipped town to go to Washington to promote Keystone XL. These were his choices and it is his choice to make. However, he then cannot turn around and say that the Prime Minister is not willing to answer questions when the Prime Minister does stand up. We will continue to take that stand.

My hon. Liberal members might say that the NDP had more opportunity to ask questions. However, our leader has made it a policy that the House of Commons is where leaders challenge each other to find out where the breakdowns are in the story.

• (1110)

There are two fundamental crises happening. One is in the Senate, and one is in the House of Commons.

There probably is a reason senators have not allowed cameras in the Senate. I say to the folks back home that I have been in the Senate watching. It is a dismal exercise. It is like watching the made men and women of the Liberal and Conservative parties hitting each other with feather dusters and then going off for drinks afterwards.

We are told by my colleagues in the Liberal Party that it is the Liberal senators who are standing up for fairness.

The key senators who should be questioned are not being questioned in the Senate, because senators protect their own. The Liberal senators have been standing up day after day saying how unfair it is that people who are facing issues of breach of trust and fraud are actually getting the boot.

I do not know what universe the Liberals live in, but if the people in my riding get an overpayment on their pension or disability cheques, the government comes back at them. There is no due process or anything else. The government comes down on them. I am dealing with a man with a disabled son who almost lost his house because of an overpayment. He was not doing anything wrong, yet day after day, the Liberal senators have been stalling in the House, in the Senate, not on the issue of getting to the bottom of the scandal but on the fundamental issue that it is simply not fair that one of their made men or women are being booted out the door. That is what the debate has been about.

If the Liberal senators were serious about dealing with this, they could use their role in the Senate for a whole manner of things, because we are not, in our lower chamber, supposed to even be able to question these august senators. As Liberal Senator Baker said, they are "above all rules". They make their own rules. In their world, if they ask for money, ask and it shall be given. Knock and the door shall be opened. They seem to live in some kind of biblical antechamber. They believe that if they ask for the money, they should receive it and that what is unfair is that senators are being booted out for having done that.

Let us talk about who should be brought forward if we were to ask questions. Let us talk about the fraud charges against Raymond Lavigne. This is not bringing up the deep, dark past. This is recent

history. The RCMP raised the issues about fraud and the fact that there were no checks and balances in the Senate. They were raised then, in the trial, when he went to jail, and nothing was done in the Senate. The senators just went on with business as usual.

Let us talk about Senator Tkachuk. There is an allegation that Senator Tkachuk gave Mike Duffy the heads-up about him ordering all the chicken wings and beer when he was two weeks in Florida, in the middle of an audit. He was on the committee, and he gave Mike Duffy the heads-up.

There is nobody on the Liberal side of the Senate asking what was going on that undermined an audit. Now they are saying that it is gross negligence. If we have allegations that senators were giving other senators a tipoff, that undermines the public trust.

One would think the senators would be asking questions of Carolyn Stewart Olsen, who is having her own problems now with the mispaying of money. She sat on that committee.

We are told that under the Nigel Wright deal, Nigel Wright would arrange the money and the senators would whitewash the audit. I would like to hear them asking in the Senate right now what senators were involved in the whitewashing of that audit, but we are not hearing anything.

The Liberal senators are standing on the principle that one of their own, a senator, even if from the other party, should never be kicked out. Senators should keep their benefits no matter what has happened.

It is a disgraced institution, and Canadians are rightly fed up with these shenanigans. They would expect someone over in that so-called upper chamber to act decently and recognize that they are living off the largesse of the Canadian people. However, we are not hearing a word of that from any of the Liberal senators at this point. They are stalling for time. They are saying that it is unfair what is happening to Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin, and Patrick Brazeau. They are talking about their right to due process, which no other Canadian would get, because these are the people who make the rules.

This scandal is a very serious issue for Canadians, because what starts with Mike Duffy and his ineligible expenses goes into the Prime Minister's Office, where Nigel Wright apparently, according to Mike Duffy, who has the paper trail, told him that his expenses were okay, because if they went after him, there were at least four other senators in that spot. Who are those other senators? I think Canadians need to know.

• (1115)

What has come forward from the evidence that came out at the beginning of February, and that nobody has contradicted, is that they would write a \$90,000 cheque. Initially, according to the RCMP affidavits, which the Conservatives are always telling us to study, Senator Irving Gerstein was involved in the discussions. He was willing to use \$30,000 from the donor base of the Conservative Party to pay, but when he found out that it was \$90,000, he refused.

Business of Supply

What was the role of Senator Irving Gerstein, or what knowledge did he have of a deal that was potentially illegal? I am not a lawyer, but to make a secret payment to a sitting politician in a matter before the Senate is certainly something that breaches the Criminal Code. Irving Gerstein would have been aware of that.

The deal was what Nigel Wright referred to as a cash repayment scheme. They would pay for Mike Duffy's audit problems, the \$90,000, and then the Senate would agree to go easy on Duffy. That is what happened. We saw an initial whitewashed audit. We saw the Prime Minister thanking Mike Duffy for showing leadership. All the things were in place until the paper trail began to come out.

On March 25, Nigel Wright transferred \$90,172.24 to Mike Duffy's lawyer. We are not sure exactly how the transfer occurred and whether it went through Conservative Party lawyers, but it was transferred. Mike Duffy said that Nigel Wright said do not worry. He would write the cheque and would let lawyers handle the details. Duffy should just follow the plan, and they would keep Carolyn Stewart Olsen and David Tkachuk at bay.

Who were those lawyers? There has to be a paper trail.

Less than two weeks after this transfer of money, which may have been highly illegal, Arthur Hamilton, the senior lawyer for the Conservative Party, sent a cheque for \$13,560 to Mike Duffy's lawyer, Elizabeth Payne. The House of Commons, through all the questions, was not told about this by the Prime Minister. Who authorized the senior Conservative Party lawyer to write this cheque if it was not Senator Irving Gerstein or someone up higher?

On May 15, this potentially illegal hush-money payoff became public. On May 16, the Prime Minister said that Nigel Wright had his full confidence. The Prime Minister knew on May 16. If the Prime Minister had no idea before, it seems rather bizarre that everyone around the Prime Minister knew.

If, on May 16, the Prime Minister knew that a potentially illegal cheque had been written by his staff in a cover-up to whitewash an audit that may have been looking at issues of breach of trust or fraud, the Prime Minister's response was certainly odd when he said that he had full confidence.

On May 17, the Prime Minister's Office said that Wright was staying on.

On May 19, the extent of the political damage was becoming very clear, and the Prime Minister said, "It is with great regret that I have accepted the resignation of Nigel Wright as my Chief of Staff."

Up to that point, we remember the questions in the House of Commons about whether the RCMP investigators were to be involved. They were saying to leave it to the ethics officer. It was actually the New Democrats that wrote a letter asking the RCMP to investigate, because we were looking at a potential crime.

The Prime Minister said in May and June that if there were any documents relating to this issue, they would be more than willing to co-operate, but he did not say that he would release any. In fact, we were told by the present Minister of Foreign Affairs that no documents existed. We know that this is simply not true.

What is surprising from the evidence that has been brought forward by Nigel Wright is that he has in his possession a very large binder of evidence regarding Mike Duffy's claims: his calendar, his travel, and all manner of issues. This was not given over to the audit, and it was not given over to the RCMP until months after the RCMP investigation began.

• (1120)

I mention this because if, on May 19, Nigel Wright walked out of his office, why would the Prime Minister's staff allow him to walk out with such a trove of evidence about a potential crime? It just beggars belief that Nigel Wright was allowed to walk with all this evidence, yet he was.

When we asked the Prime Minister a really simple and straightforward question—who knew in the Prime Minister's Office?—he said again and again that Nigel Wright was the sole actor. We asked about Benjamin Perrin's role. We were not given straightforward answers. We now know that Chris Woodcock, in the Prime Minister's Office, Benjamin Perrin, and David van Hemmen were involved. We need to know to what degree.

I refer the House to the latest article on the RCMP statements. They are now looking for the paper trail regarding new allegations that have emerged that this RBC mortgage loan was a front set up by the Prime Minister's Office and that they told Mike Duffy to go along.

The allegation Mike Duffy made, and we have not seen the Prime Minister stand up in the House and say that Mike Duffy is a liar, is that the Prime Minister's staff coached him to lie to the Canadian people about this deal and the fake RBC loan. The Prime Minister continues to repeat that line in the House. His Parliamentary Secretary continues to repeat that line.

At no point have we heard the Prime Minister say that he was told by his staff that Mike Duffy had an RBC loan. What the heck was going on? The Prime Minister seems to have real disinterest in finding out within his office if people were playing a game.

In fact, we now know that there was a senator who phoned Mike Duffy and threatened him, saying that he had better go along and do what the Prime Minister said. Who was that person? We have not heard the Prime Minister answer that.

I would like to focus on the RBC loan, because it is a very important issue. What we are seeing now from Sergeant Biage Carrese of the RCMP National Division, in a November 1 letter, is that:

Emails from the PMO specifically relating to a script for Senator Duffy to follow in advance of obtaining funds from a RBC loan to repay the Receiver General

may be material to the RCMP's investigation.

Duffy has said:

On Feb. 21, after all of the threats and intimidation, I reluctantly agreed to go along with this dirty scheme.

I certainly do not think that too many Canadians believe that Mike Duffy is the most trustworthy person. However, the difference between Mike Duffy and the Prime Minister at this point is that Mike Duffy is providing us with a paper trail. We are getting nothing from the Prime Minister. It is quite a shocking set of circumstances when someone who has abused the public trust as much as Mike Duffy is being given more credit than the Prime Minister.

We are talking about the RCMP actually investigating not just the issue of whether a potentially illegal payout was made, which was meant to cover up the breach of trust and potential fraud against the taxpayers, but that it was the Prime Minister's Office that set up the fake story about the RBC and coached Mike Duffy. If he did not go along, they would go public with the fact that he was not even legitimately allowed to sit in the Senate.

What kind of contempt for the Canadian people is that? Even in a system as dodgy as the Senate, they were all willing to cover up the fact that Mike Duffy was not even eligible to sit in the Senate. He had to go along. It was being orchestrated. Who was it? Was it Ray Novak? Was it Chris Woodcock? Was it Benjamin Perrin? Who was the one in the Prime Minister's Office coaching Mike Duffy through this scheme?

• (1125)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments. I think it comes as no surprise that I would disagree with a number of things he said. Of course, that is why we are here. It is to express our opinions and ask those questions.

We have actually been spending a lot more time together than I think the hon. member ever hoped he would be spending with me, but so be it.

I wonder if he would agree on one thing, though, which is that what we have before us with this motion from the Liberals is really an embarrassingly shallow attempt by the Liberals to deflect the fact that they are fighting so hard to maintain the status quo in the Senate.

Regardless of anything, at least most of us would agree, on this side and on the official opposition side, that there has to be accountability in the Senate.

I wonder if he would agree that this is just an embarrassingly shallow attempt by the Liberals to deflect from the fact that they are fighting so hard to maintain the status quo. What are his thoughts on recent reports we have heard that the Liberal leader is actually instructing his senators to abstain from voting on the three motions we have before us?

• (1130)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, and yes, we are going to be spending a lot of time together. We do not seem to agree on very much, but we are maintaining a professional relationship because we are all here to represent the Canadian people. We have a serious issue before us in the House of Commons, so I will continue to push him and his government very hard.

Business of Supply

In terms of the motion, I certainly do not think it has been thought through very well. Again, any effort to shed light on this we are willing to support, but this is the avenue.

In terms of what is going on in the Senate, I find it absolutely appalling that we have seen day after day Liberal senators not interested in getting to the bottom of the roles that senators have been playing in this issue. They have been completely walking around the fact that many senators are being named in police documents as being involved in a potentially illegal act. If the Liberal senators were serious about this, they would be using the upper chamber to do that, but they are not. They are protecting the made men and women who sit in the Senate for their perks; that is what it is.

At the end of the day, I think it would be an abomination to the Canadian people for all those senators who waxed on and on about the importance of the upper chamber and why it is so important to Canadians to sit on their hands. They better stand up and vote.

Certainly, if television cameras were in there, I bet the Canadian people would be down there tomorrow giving them all the heave ho.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay was quite vocal in his criticism that the motion does not go far enough. I am reminded of the saying that “perfection is the enemy of the good”.

I have only been in this chamber a short time, but it is my understanding that only the House of Commons can order a member to appear before the committee, and only the House can order the Prime Minister to appear.

There is absolutely nothing in the motion that would prevent the committee from inviting and ordering others to appear, as the hon. member has suggested. The point of our motion is to ensure that one of the people who appears before the committee is the Prime Minister, and only the House can do that.

Could I have the member's response to that please?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I want my hon. colleague to understand that we are certainly interested in getting to the bottom of what has happened and we will support efforts. However, the problem I guess is a question of perception.

When one calls out a prime minister, the person who calls out the prime minister is the leader of a party. It is not my position as the critic to call out the prime minister. I will call out my colleague who is the parliamentary secretary.

The leader of the Liberal Party has the opportunity to show leadership at this moment. He has not been here. He has not been asking the questions. We have been in the House for the last number of weeks and he simply has not shown up. If one is only going to ask three questions out of a possible 45 on this, it is hard to convince Canadians that one takes it all that seriously.

Business of Supply

Yes, we are more than willing to study this at the ethics committee, but we think that the main issue is for the Prime Minister to answer the questions from the two leaders in the House. Our work in committee I think is with all the other players. That is who we should be bringing to committee, but we are certainly more than willing to work with our colleagues on trying to find an appropriate solution.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a question that bothers me that we did not get an answer to.

The Prime Minister is the person who put Mike Duffy there. He knew Mike Duffy stayed in Ottawa for many years and had his little chalet in P.E.I. However, the Prime Minister said that he wanted the province to tell him who it wanted in the Senate. Did he ever get that from P.E.I.?

If he believes so much that the Senate should work well, how did the Prime Minister not know that Mike Duffy's primary task was not to be in the Senate to carry out sober second thought, to look after the region of P.E.I. or to look after the minority, but to do fundraising for the Conservative Party? Here again, the Prime Minister did not know about that.

For all those years, Mike Duffy and Wallin were going around because they were the stars at CTV and in Toronto and on television. They were used by the Prime Minister for fundraising for the Conservative Party.

Does the member agree with me?

• (1135)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for returning us to the fundamental problem, which is the cynicism of a Prime Minister who chose people who were not even eligible to sit in the Senate. I was reading an article about Pamela Wallin. She said she no longer lives in Saskatchewan but she has her Christmas there. Well, when I go visit my relatives at Christmas it does not make me their legal representative.

They knew they were not eligible to sit in the Senate. They breached the Constitution. No one in the Senate even bothered to say anything because how many of them actually live where they are supposed to represent? How many times do these people stand up and speak for their regions? Some of them never speak for them. In the case of Duffy and Wallin, they were out there doing the heavy fundraising, just as many of the Liberal senators do. They were doing the organizing of the party. That is an abuse of public trust. We need to clip the wings of those senators and stop that rip-off of the taxpayers.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on this because a lot of Canadians do not realize just what the role of many of our senators is. We see Mac Harb, one of the chief fundraisers for the Liberal Party, now under investigation by the RCMP. We saw Senator Gerstein, who was the last speaker at the Conservative convention in Calgary, say at the beginning of his speech that he is a self-admitted bagman and proud to say he is a bagman. He did not mention the part where he is also paid by the Canadian taxpayer to run around as a bagman for the Conservative Party; on and on it goes.

I do not know how many of my Conservative colleagues across the way had fundraisers with Mr. Duffy or Madam Wallin, or whether the money they spent on their campaigns was garnered that way. That is what the Senate has been for so long.

The curious thing for me is, and I will put this question to my colleague, we are dealing with the Liberal motion here today, asking the Prime Minister to testify under oath. Of course, testifying under oath would be a relief from the general comments we get from the Prime Minister day after day. However, just last week, the Liberals voted against the New Democrat motion to have no more partisan activity for senators.

They should stop using the taxpayer to fly them around the country to fundraise for the Conservative and Liberal parties of Canada. If they want to go fundraise, they should do it the way we do it. We pay our own way. I do not understand why Conservative senators feel that the Canadian taxpayers should be buying the flights and the limos that truck them around the country to raise money for partisan activities.

If the Liberals were serious about cleaning up the mess in the Senate at all and really meant what they were saying here, why would they vote against a motion that says no more partisan activities will be accepted as legal expenses for senators, Conservative and Liberal alike?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals built the corrupt system that is the Senate. It is their machine. It is where they put their party men and their bagmen for years. They are not even asking right now to go after the Senate and clean it up. They are only asking to protect perks. That is the fundamental problem. If we do not abolish the Senate, if we stripped it of its partisan rule, then Canadians might have some faith in it. However, when they see people who flip pancakes and do fundraisers for the party getting appointed as made men and women for life, no wonder Canadians are cynical and fed up. They look to them to show some leadership and they just see people looking after their own and protecting their time at the trough.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to participate in the debate and discussion around this issue today.

What we are looking for are some answers. We are trying to get the Prime Minister to come before our committee so we can get some answers as to what went wrong and when he knew this was ongoing, so we can get to the bottom of it. One thing I have learned in politics is that the thing that we hold most dear is trust, and once it is lost it is gone forever. We work very hard to gain the trust of our constituents. We work very hard to gain the trust of Canadians.

However, the moment we have lost that trust, it is gone and it is hard to get it back.

We are trying to get to the bottom of this because Canadians have lost their trust in the current Prime Minister and he should feel compelled to want to regain that trust. Everywhere I have gone over the last few weeks and over this past summer, every barbecue, every function I attended, people would come up to me and talk about this. Canadians are engaged. They want to know what went on. They want to get to the bottom of it.

Business of Supply

It is important that we in this chamber find out what happened and put this behind us, so that we can move on to some of the more important issues. I am sure the government has a lot of important issues that it would like to put forward. However, this needs to be put to bed first. That is why the motion is on the table. The problem is that there have been a lot of contradictory statements made in here, in the media, in the Senate, and by the RCMP, as well. There is a lot to get to the bottom of.

First, let us review the timeline on this particular case. I will focus on one small aspect of the timeline.

This started last November. November 22 is when the Senate internal economy committee had the task of reviewing these senators' expenses. This was first brought out a year ago. Then, through December, it was reported that Senator Duffy had made claims on his living expenses. Then it continued into January 2013, when the auditing firm of Deloitte was hired. Then it carried into February, when the Senate said anyone should repay the money and the Prime Minister reported to his caucus that if anyone had received any of this money, it was time to repay it.

Therefore, it had been burning for almost three or four months.

Then it continued throughout February with the different claims on residency of senators and the amount owing by Mr. Duffy got to the \$90,000 mark in March of 2013. Then it carried on through April, as well, when there was the whitewashing of reports and the audits were completed. Then it all came to a head in May.

This is the time frame I would like to discuss today. What exactly happened during those five days in May when the Prime Minister was thrust into this discussion? That is the most important time frame in all of this discussion, trying to get to the bottom of how the Prime Minister handled this during those five days in May.

Despite this having gone on for almost six to eight months, let us give the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt, that prior to May 14, he knew nothing about the scheme of how Senator Duffy repaid his expenses. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt for the purposes of this discussion today and let us focus on those five days in May when the Prime Minister lost a lot of credibility and a lot of trust.

It started on May 14, at 10:01 p.m., when the report was filed that Senator Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright had an arrangement to repay the \$90,000.

● (1140)

I have been a political staffer. We all know that there are teams of communications officials in the Prime Minister's Office who watch every single news cast, read every single paper and monitor this stuff 24/7. This is when this story really started, on May 14. At 10:01 p. m., this report broke. I can say that right then the communications teams in the Prime Minister's Office went into high gear. Everybody was alerted that this story had come out and had been put solely on the chief of staff of the Prime Minister on May 14.

I will give the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt that he was home on Sussex Drive in bed, not paying attention to this, spending time with his family, and this was not brought to his attention on that evening.

Hon. John Baird: Would you want to call him at 11 o'clock at night?

Mr. Scott Andrews: I wouldn't want to call him at 11 o'clock at night. As a staffer, I would not have made that phone call at 11 o'clock at night, and that is fair. However, the real story begins the next morning on how this was handled when the Prime Minister woke up and found out what Nigel Wright had done.

This is where this story gets interesting. Obviously, on the morning of May 15 all hands were on deck in the Prime Minister's Office, all the suspects who were involved with this: Nigel Wright, Ray Novak, Benjamin Perrin, Chris Woodcock, and David van Hemmen. I believe the Prime Minister, too, was involved with this important discussion, because on May 28 in a question in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister stated:

On Wednesday, May 15, I was told about it. At that very moment, I demanded that my office ensure that the public was informed, and it was informed appropriately.

He demanded his office inform the public on May 15. I think he also demanded in that office that morning, of all his staffers, who else knew about this: "Who in this office knew about this transaction? I need to get to the bottom of this." Obviously, Nigel Wright spoke up and, instead of firing Nigel right there on the spot for betraying the Prime Minister's confidence, he kept him around for another five days. I will come back to that part of the story.

At that critical moment, when the Prime Minister asked who else in the office knew about it, I am sure that these three individuals either said something then to the Prime Minister that they knew something about it or they did not. Either way, they were part of the cover-up on this whole issue and they all should have been shown the door immediately. Not one of these individuals, one being the Prime Minister's own lawyer in his office, raised his hand and said, "We have a little problem here. I don't think Nigel should have done this." He did not say anything.

Chris Woodcock, director of issues management for the PMO, was in high gear on May 15, because when this all broke in the morning of May 15, there were emails in which these guys went into full damage control. There is an email dated May 15 in which the secret deal to help Mike Duffy was reported. Woodcock asked Duffy, "Can you confirm whether you advised the Senate ethics officer of any loans/gifts involved in the March 25th repayment?" Woodcock continued to say, "Trying to cover off all the angles". That is very important. He is trying to cover all the angles.

Obviously, on May 15, Woodcock was part of this and they were trying to cover all the angles. They were trying to cover all the damage control on this particular file. He knew what had gone on. He asked whether Mike Duffy had notified the Senate ethics officer about this \$90,000 gift. It was high gear. The Prime Minister, at that particular time, should have shown them all the door. He should have taken charge of the issue and said he knew nothing about this and what they did was wrong. No, that did not happen.

Business of Supply

● (1145)

Then we move to May 16, the next day. This had been brewing for a day now, and the Prime Minister's Office was trying to figure out how to get to the bottom of this and how to control this situation.

Then the Prime Minister's communications director, Mr. Andrew MacDougall, who had no knowledge of what had gone on, whose name is not mentioned in any court documents, was doing his job. He came out and made this statement on May 16, the next day—May 14, 15 and now 16:

The Prime Minister has full confidence in Mr. Wright and Mr. Wright is staying on.

The Prime Minister did not get to the bottom of it. He did not ask if it had actually happened. Mr. Wright had the full confidence of the Prime Minister the very next day.

What the Prime Minister's Office and Conservatives were trying to do was to see if they could ride out the storm. They wanted to see if they could get through the storm. They did not want to fire anybody or throw anybody under the bus.

Then the story continued to percolate through May 17 and 18. Duffy is kicked out of caucus. Wallin is moved to the side.

Then a number of Conservatives came out to defend Nigel Wright, and they continue to do it to this day. This past weekend the MP for Edmonton—Leduc came out and defended Nigel Wright as an honourable fellow.

The Minister of Employment and Social Development tweeted on May 19:

Very sorry about Nigel Wright's resignation. Brilliant, decent man who made huge sacrifices to go into public service. We need more like him.

This was upon hearing about the resignation of Nigel Wright. It was later that we learned he was dismissed or resigned, a story that keeps changing.

The Minister of Industry came out and said:

Nigel Wright is a great Canadian. Canada is stronger because of his service as Chief of Staff to our Prime Minister.

Then the Minister of State (Democratic Reform) came out and said:

Saddened to hear of Nigel Wright's departure. He is an honourable man, and great Canadian.

Then another MP came out, the member for Calgary Centre, saying that she really felt for Nigel Wright; it was right thing to do.

No, it was not the right thing to do. The right thing would have been, when they first heard about it, to have fired his arse out the door. That would have been the right thing to do, but the Conservatives tried to get through this scandal in five days, trying to see if it would go away.

That is the essence of why we need to get the Prime Minister to come and testify before the ethics committee. It is because of this story. That was May 19.

Then on May 24, the Prime Minister admitted that perhaps he should have accepted the resignation sooner. Well, he should have fired him immediately. If he had no knowledge of what had gone on,

and he had not gone along with it, the Prime Minister should have fired him immediately. If he did not fire him, it would lead people to believe that he knew more than he is letting on.

That is where we are coming down to trust. There is a saying out there, "...what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive".

It is so true. It can happen in all aspects of politics, when the story starts changing, if one is telling one story to some people and another story to other people, that is the problem. It is the tangled web this Prime Minister weaved for himself. He needs to get out from underneath it. He needs to come clean. He needs to fess up.

One thing that is very honourable in this place is that we sometimes say "I am sorry. I did something wrong". People should not be punished for saying those things.

That is why this motion is here. I would welcome it before the ethics committee. It is a place for us to get to the bottom of this and make sure trust is regained in our government, trust is regained in parliamentarians.

● (1150)

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of State (Science and Technology, and Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's intervention today would have more meaning if he had more support. I do not know if CPAC is available in prison or not; maybe the senator there is having an opportunity to watch it. However, the question is quite simple. Does the member, his caucus and their colleagues in the other place support the kinds of Senate reform that we have been championing now for the past seven years?

● (1155)

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, that party used to be the champion of Senate reform a long time ago, and it obviously did nothing with it because the Prime Minister appointed these senators, 59 of them, the most senators ever appointed by a prime minister.

That is not the issue here today. The issue is how the Prime Minister has handled this fiasco and what happened during his leadership as Prime Minister during this fiasco. That is the motion here today. If the member wants to talk about Senate reform, we will talk about that when the Supreme Court brings down the ruling on how to move forward. Do not confuse the two issues here today. This is about the Prime Minister's handling of this debacle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Liberals moved this motion, does that mean that they regret their decision to vote against the motion moved by the NDP last week to restrict the partisan activities and travel of senators?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I do not see how the two motions are relative. This motion is about the Prime Minister's Office, so the two are not related.

Business of Supply

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague if he would agree that the key issues here are the ability of the Prime Minister to say exactly the truth about what happened and why he is dodging all questions about this issue.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, this is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to come clean and get the facts of the story on the record in a manner that does not cause confusion. When the Prime Minister answers a lot of questions, he says one thing, says something else, causes confusion. That is manipulating the situation. This is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to come clean.

I come back to what I said about regaining the trust of Canadians. Once a politician has lost trust, he or she is done. The Prime Minister needs to come clean. We need to get to the bottom of this and we need to know all the facts. The Prime Minister is the only person who can clear the air and put this to bed.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my friend across the way on a couple of points. This is an opportunity for the Prime Minister. I was at the Calgary convention observing on behalf of New Democrats, and I thought there was an opportunity for the Prime Minister to come clean in the safest room he is going to have between now and the next election, I would offer, and he chose not to. He just said the same things he says here week after week, but in an angrier, louder tone. That was his choice.

My friend talked about trust. It must be concerning to my Conservative friends, particularly the Prime Minister. They have had many failed strategies on this, but the strategy was to say that no one is going to believe Mike Duffy, so let us put up the Prime Minister's reputation against Mike Duffy's on this story and clearly Canadians will fall on the Prime Minister's side. It must be so unnerving for Conservatives to see polling and reaction of Canadians saying they trust neither of them very much. They seem to trust Mike Duffy a little bit more. That hurts. That has to sting when a Prime Minister has built his whole persona around credibility and trust.

To my Liberal friend across the way, I am confused. We have asked questions about trying to make the Senate less partisan and not allow it to use taxpayer money to raise funds for the parties. That is the issue, and we have talked about getting rid of the Senate in the first place. The Prime Minister's shortcuts around democracy, breaking his promise 59 times to Canadians that he would not appoint senators, is part of this issue. This is the root of it. We cannot simply clip at the branches and say we have fixed the Senate because we got rid of Mike Duffy, Pam Wallin and Patrick Brazeau. That is not the case. We have to go for the root and branch. We have to absolutely take out the heart of this thing.

The only answer the Liberals have for Canadians right now, unfortunately, the only problem they see with the Senate is that they have to appoint more Liberal senators; that will fix things. That is not true.

In looking at the news today, I see Mac Harb, one of the Liberals' favourites, who did what with the privileges he had as a senator? Clearly, the position that the Liberal leader has taken consistently is that somehow tweaking around the edges and not having to actually reform or abolish the Senate—we believe in abolishment—is going

to be enough and that this nightmare will not just return again once the spotlight turns down a bit.

It is not tenable. It is not a tenable argument. It is not logical. It does not make any sense. If Liberals believe in this motion that the Prime Minister has to come clean on all these things and that there are serious fundamental flaws in the Senate, then why not agree when we propose motions to get at those same fundamental flaws in the Senate? Why have it one way and then try to have it another?

• (1200)

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, the opposition House leader likes to smear everybody. He would like to bring the Liberals and the Conservatives in rather than focus on the issue at hand.

It is about the characters who are involved on that side of the House in this scandal and about that Prime Minister knowing about it. It is about Gerstein, Tkachuk, Stewart-Olsen, Novak, Perrin, Woodcock, Hemmen, Rogers, Jenni Byrne, and Senator Finley. What do all those individuals have in common? They are members of the Conservative Party. That is where this problem resolves, and the problem sits at the feet of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, let us clarify this. My friend read out a list of all these senators who have done really bad things. Some of them have stolen things and are being investigated by the RCMP. However, his list stops short by party affiliation. As soon as he runs out of Conservative senators who have stolen from taxpayers, he cannot go to those Liberal senators who have done the exact same thing. Does he not understand how that contradiction, that hypocrisy, might rub Canadians slightly the wrong way—that it is okay to do something as a Liberal that is not okay to do as a Conservative? That does not make any sense.

That is why for decades New Democrats have stood in this place and argued that the system itself is the problem. The privileges that are given to senators, writ large, to enjoy as they please on the so-called honour system will feed the very scandal that is now at the feet of the Prime Minister, with the RCMP knocking on the Prime Minister's Office seemingly every week.

To simply suggest that this is just a one-off scandal, that Mac Harb did nothing wrong, and that Lavigne, who is another Liberal senator and is in jail, did nothing wrong because they are Liberals reminds me of the Gomery inquiry, when if it was being done in a cause that was aligned with the Liberals, then it was okay because it was a Canadian cause.

Theft is theft. Breaking the public trust is breaking the public trust. Why not simply address it in the motion before the House? Why not simply agree that reform, and perhaps abolishment, is the right cause?

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, if those Liberal senators and those Conservative senators have done something wrong and have been charged by the RCMP, yes, the full extent of the law should come down on them absolutely. No one said it should not, and no one is saying they should get away with this just because they had a Liberal brand or a Conservative brand. The full extent of the law should come down on these senators.

Business of Supply

However, the motion before the House today is about the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office, and his involvement in this. There are lots of angles to this story, but today we are talking about the Prime Minister, what the people at the Prime Minister's Office knew, when they knew it, and their responsibility. We are not dragging down the whole Parliament on Guy Fawkes Night, coming in here and burning the whole place down and burning down the Senate. That is not what we are talking about on this Tuesday on Guy Fawkes Night.

We are talking about the Prime Minister's Office, who was involved, and the characters who are still there, such as the Ray Novaks of the world. He is still the chief of staff. He was in on this scheme, knew about it, and was promoted to chief of staff. That is the issue.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition motion, as moved by the hon. member for Wascana, states:

[*English*]

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

There are two reasons for this motion. The first pertains to Canadians' right to know the truth about what we can call the cheque scandal. It is impossible to get the truth from the government and the Prime Minister either inside or outside the House. The government is ducking the issue, refusing to answer, only giving little bits of information at a time and constantly contradicting itself. That is why the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics must look into this matter and call all of those involved, including the Prime Minister, and have them testify under oath as witnesses.

The second reason for this motion is that the situation calls into question the Prime Minister's integrity, openness and ability to tell Canadians the truth. The very role of Prime Minister is affected. I do not know whether the Prime Minister is aware of this, but more and more Canadians do not believe him and see him as secretive.

In our political system, the person who holds the office of Prime Minister has so much power and so many ways that he can profoundly affect the lives of Canadians and how the country operates that we cannot have the slightest doubt about his honesty and openness. We may disagree with his values, decisions or style, but we must never doubt his honesty and openness.

In the cheque scandal, the Prime Minister is either telling the truth—and he must demonstrate that such is the case in order to dispel the doubts—or the Prime Minister is hiding things that must be brought to light and that could call into question whether he is worthy of his office. Canadians have the right to know which it is. They have the right to know the truth.

Let us forget for a moment about the role of Prime Minister and think about an ordinary citizen. What does any honest and unfairly suspected person do when his integrity is called into question? He hastens to show that the allegations are unfounded and that he is an honest person. He puts everything on the table to clear his name.

However, if this person does not have a clear conscience and has something to hide, what does he do? He dodges the issue, obfuscates and does everything he can to throw up a smokescreen and blame his accomplices. Is that not exactly what the government and the Prime Minister are doing—ducking, obfuscating, throwing up a smokescreen and blaming their accomplices?

This has to stop. The government must come clean, the Prime Minister must come clean and they all must appear before a parliamentary committee, under oath, as there is no other way to get at the truth.

Let us go back to the sequence of events as we know it.

[*English*]

On December 3, 2012, questions were raised about Senator Duffy's housing claims. Among other issues, Senator Duffy was claiming his longtime Ottawa residence as a secondary residence and his cottage in P.E.I. as his primary residence.

On December 4, 2012, the Prime Minister's then chief of staff, Mr. Nigel Wright, emailed Senator Duffy. The email said that he had been told that Duffy complied with all applicable rules on expenses and noted that "...there would be several Senators with similar arrangements". It concluded, "This sure seems to be a smear."

On February 13, 2013, the Prime Minister told Senator Duffy to repay, according to Senator Duffy because the optics were not good with the party base. Nigel Wright was present at the meeting. Then Nigel Wright offered a \$90,000 cheque to Duffy. Funds were wired to Duffy's lawyer on March 25.

On March 4, 2013, Duffy's lawyer sent Conservative Party lawyer Arthur Hamilton an invoice for \$13,560 for his legal fees related to the Senate expense repayment deal.

On April 4, 2013, Arthur Hamilton sent a cheque to Duffy's lawyer for \$13,560.

On May 15, 2013, the payment by Nigel Wright was eventually made public.

On May 19, 2013, Nigel Wright is no longer the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

On June 5, 2013, in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister said that Nigel Wright made the decision to give Mike Duffy a \$90,000 cheque, that it was Mr. Wright's decision, and that it was not communicated to the Prime Minister or members of his office.

On October 24, 2013, the Prime Minister said in the House that Mr. Wright had admitted that what he did was wrong, that he had taken responsibility for his actions, and that he informed very few people.

Therefore in June the Prime Minister said that only Wright knew of the money, and in October he said that a few people knew. RCMP affidavits filed in court show that numerous Prime Minister's senior staff knew about the \$90,000 and that they were involved in the cover-up.

The Prime Minister has stated that on February 13 he ordered Mike Duffy to repay his expenses, but from that date until May 16—three full months—we are told the Prime Minister was never briefed on his hand-picked star senator, nor did he ask any questions. During that time, \$90,000 was paid to Senator Duffy, Duffy's \$13,000 legal bills for the cover-up were paid by Conservative donors, a Deloitte audit was subverted, a Senate report was corrupted, and a false story was concocted by the PMO about a bank mortgage.

The Prime Minister needs to come clean with Canadians and tell them when he first heard that his staff, for which he is accountable, had counselled Mike Duffy to lie.

This weekend Senator Irving Gerstein, chairman of the Conservative Fund of Canada, stated that he refused a request by Wright to repay Duffy's bogus expenses. This statement directly contradicts statements made by Nigel Wright's lawyers in an RCMP affidavit, which stated that the party was prepared to pay \$32,000 but declined to pay when the bill reached \$90,000. Who is lying, Nigel Wright or Senator Gerstein?

In his role as chairman of the fund, Senator Gerstein reports directly to the Prime Minister. Are Canadians supposed to believe that Gerstein failed to mention this PMO conspiracy that he was involved in to the Prime Minister during their many meetings over many months?

Now let us consider the number of senior officials who knew about the Wright-Duffy deal. Wright told the RCMP that he informed the following people of the \$90,000 cheque: Conservative Senator Irving Gerstein, chairman of the Conservative Fund of Canada; Benjamin Perrin, the Prime Minister's personal lawyer in the PMO; David van Hemmen, formerly Nigel Wright's assistant, now policy adviser to the Minister of State for Finance; and Chris Woodcock, director of issues management in the PMO at the time, and now chief of staff of the Minister of Natural Resources.

Duffy alleges that Woodcock wrote the line that he used on national television, which was that Duffy took out a bank loan to repay his housing expenses. It was a line that Senator Duffy has said was designed "...to deceive Canadians as to the real source of the \$90,000".

• (1210)

He also said that Woodcock even followed up with Duffy the day after the bank to ensure that he was sticking to the line.

It has also been reported that Patrick Rogers, then legislative assistant to the Prime Minister and now director of policy for the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, knew of the \$90,000 cheque.

Additionally, it has been reported that Jenni Byrne, former director or political operations for the Conservative Party and current deputy chief of staff to the Prime Minister, knew of the Conservative Party's

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plan to repay Duffy's expenses when they were thought to be \$32,000.

Senator Duffy has also provided documentation to show that Conservative Party lawyer Arthur Hamilton was involved in the paying of Senator Duffy's legal fees.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Who else knew about it?

The Prime Minister himself must answer, rather than trying to pin the whole affair on Nigel Wright alone. It is disturbing that the Prime Minister dramatically changed his version of the facts with regard to Nigel Wright's departure.

Let us return to the sequence of events.

[*English*]

On May 16, the PMO issued the following statement, "Mr. Wright will not be resigning...Mr. Wright has the full support of the Prime Minister".

On May 19, the PMO issued a statement from the Prime Minister, which said:

It is with great regret that I have accepted the resignation of Nigel Wright as my Chief of Staff. I accept that Nigel believed he was acting in the public interest, but I understand the decision he has taken to resign. I want to thank Nigel for his tremendous contribution to our Government over the past two and a half years.

On June 5, the Prime Minister stated the following in the House of Commons:

—it was Mr. Wright who made the decision to take his personal funds and give those to Mr. Duffy so that Mr. Duffy could reimburse the taxpayers. Those were his decisions. They were not communicated to me or to members of my office.

On October 25, in a radio interview, the Prime Minister stated, "As you know I had a chief of staff who made an inappropriate payment to Mr. Duffy. He was dismissed".

On October 29, the Prime Minister stated in the House of Commons, "on our side there is one person responsible for this deception, and that person is Mr. Wright, by his own admission".

[*Translation*]

First, the Prime Minister defended Nigel Wright for five days, from May 15 to 19, then he let him go "with great regret" on May 19. Lately he has said that he fired him for lying.

Fewer and fewer Canadians believe the Prime Minister because he keeps changing his story.

[*English*]

Like all other aspects of this sordid affair, the Prime Minister has not provided Canadians with the truth.

In conclusion, what is at stake?

First, paying a sitting legislator money to do something has the potential to be illegal. It has been reported that Duffy had to agree to stop talking and to stop co-operating with an audit as a condition of payment.

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Second, there is a cover-up. That cover-up starts with the source of the funds. Duffy alleges the PMO wrote lines designed to deceive Canadians as to the source of the money, mainly that he took out a bank loan.

[*Translation*]

Who is involved in this cover-up? All the key players I mentioned must testify under oath before the committee. The Prime Minister must also testify under oath before the committee because Canadians have the right to know the truth.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The Senate has never been a chamber of sober second thought or particularly representative of the regions, which it should have been, according to the Fathers of Confederation. It has always been a haven for the cronies of the party in power, no matter which party that is. Blue or red, things have always been the same.

The Liberals, through this motion, are saying they want to preserve the status quo, although they will be removing a few bad apples from the Senate. The problem is that there is an increasing number of bad apples. I feel that the whole orchard is contaminated. It is becoming hard to find any apples that are not rotten. I am sure there are some. I do not mean to say that everyone is crooked, far from it, just that there are too many problems.

I wonder why the Liberals seem to be defending the status quo regarding the operation of the Senate. Given that there are so many problems and that this institution is decaying and falling apart, would it not be in the public interest to simply abolish it?

• (1220)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, we have colleagues in the House, especially on the Conservative side, who have huge problems and have not always followed the rules or the laws. Does that mean the House of Commons should be abolished?

I am afraid the NDP has not realized that it is helping the Prime Minister by throwing him a lifeline. Instead of making the Prime Minister the central issue, instead of trying to find out whether he is telling the truth or not or whether the person holding the highest political office in the land is honest and straightforward, the NDP is giving him the chance to say that the problem lies with the Senate and that the government will be reopening the Constitution because of Mike Duffy's improper spending, which is completely irresponsible.

My colleague should realize that it is also possible to reverse the situation. We could be putting his leader in the hot seat, with what happened in Laval in the 1990s. Maybe this should happen one day.

However, at this time, this is a diversion the Prime Minister is trying to create at the expense of my hon. colleague's leader. The only thing that truly matters at the moment is whether our country is being led by an honest man.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member clearly thinks that the problem is only between Mike Duffy and the Prime Minister. However, the New Democrats know that it goes beyond that. The Senate structure is fundamentally

flawed. Just look at the years of partisan Senate appointments for party cronies and failed candidates.

We have to wonder about someone like Percy Downe—who was former prime minister Chrétien's director of appointments—and his role within the Senate Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, on which he currently sits. This appointment continued in the tradition of Liberal patronage. Mr. Downe charged a \$5,000 expense to his hospitality budget for pens and playing cards. That is reminiscent of the sponsorship scandal.

Could the member explain how Liberal senators giving speeches at partisan activities falls under the Liberals' definitions of accountability?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, if the member's question was about who is doing the most to make Parliament as a whole more transparent, the answer is clearly the Liberal leader. He has made suggestions to make Parliament more transparent, and these are being implemented in the Senate by the Liberal Senate caucus. We could say that Liberal senators are showing more transparency than NDP members, but that is not the issue at hand.

The issue at hand is whether our Prime Minister is telling the truth. Did he know about the \$90,000 cheque that was given to a parliamentarian to buy his silence, something that is very serious and potentially illegal?

The Prime Minister first said that only his former chief of staff, Mr. Wright, knew about the cheque. Now he admits that other people were aware, but he refuses to say who, because he is starting to get caught in a spider's web.

That is what is going on and that is why the Prime Minister must come testify in committee under oath.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Liberal friend.

We agree with him and his party about the scandal involving the PMO, but we need to address the root cause of the problem. The Liberal Party feels that the system works well and that the status quo should be maintained. We feel that if the current system remains in place, there will be more cases like Mr. Duffy's. There might be a Liberal Mr. Duffy involved. That is the problem.

My friend, whom I consider to be a true democrat, does not believe that there is something fundamentally wrong. It is ludicrous to think that the Senate is good. It is impossible to be a democrat and also think that the Senate is a good system for a modern, advanced, free country such as ours.

Yes, this is a good motion, but the Prime Minister and his party are remaining silent and will vote against it. That is the problem at the heart of this scandal, and this motion alone will not fix it—

• (1225)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his support for the motion.

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However, I would ask him to ensure that the Prime Minister does not wriggle out of this. I would be pleased to talk to my colleague about whether Canada's Senate should be elected, appointed or abolished, particularly once the Supreme Court renders its opinion.

In the meantime, I hope that we can clarify the fundamental issue here, namely who knew about the hush money that was given to a parliamentarian, who in the Prime Minister's entourage knew about it and whether he knew about it. We need those answers sooner than later. That is why we have moved this motion.

[English]

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to ask my colleague a question with regard to his comments and contribution to the debate today.

As we know, there have been a lot of contradictory responses in the House of Commons around what has been happening in the Senate, who was responsible, who should be responsible, the actions they took and the time frames in which those actions were taken.

We heard the Prime Minister say over the weekend that he could not care less. I would like to ask my colleague today if that is the same approach he sees from the Prime Minister when it comes to his commitments around the Senate that go back almost seven years.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the same as I did for my NDP colleagues. The issue is not about reform of the Senate. I would be very pleased to discuss that and the reasons why it was not realistic to go ahead alone as a Parliament without working with the provinces, including her province, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The key issue is this. Do we have a Prime Minister who is saying the truth to Canadians about the possibility to have bribed a parliamentarian, something that is potentially illegal?

We should not offer the Prime Minister any ability to dodge this question. He should answer it in a straightforward manner.

Frankly, if it were me or any Canadian whose honesty was in question, we would be all over the place saying, "I am honest and I will prove it". Why is the Prime Minister doing the exact opposite? Does he have anything to hide?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that my friend from Labrador is also interested in the idea of what to do with the Senate, although the Liberals are focused on one aspect of it today.

At the heart of this was a fundamental lack of democracy in which senators did not feel that they owed anything to anybody. Mike Duffy, Pam Wallin, Brazeau and all the rest down the line did not feel accountable to anybody. They also felt their job was why the Prime Minister put them there: to raise money for the party.

Does my friend think that is honourable work for senators to use taxpayer money for fundraising activities for a political party, as the situation is now for Conservative and Liberal senators?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, it certainly is not acceptable to use public money for partisan purposes and we are against it.

However, we are also against the possibility that the PMO, and maybe the Prime Minister himself, is involved in a tactic to cover up an attempt to bribe a parliamentarian and to buy his silence. This is

so serious that I urge my colleague to not give any diversion to the Prime Minister to focus on this issue. I would be so pleased, in another forum, in another context, to discuss with him the way we may have a Senate that would be workable for Canadians as to have a House where all the MPs would be honest and would not play games with their expenses.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in this Liberal opposition day motion.

• (1230)

[Translation]

As my colleagues may know, I used to work for the Royal Bank. Perhaps that is why I find the whole aspect involving the Royal Bank most disturbing. Of course, it is not the Royal Bank's fault, but this does involve the bank.

[English]

We learned during the Watergate days—and I am old enough to remember—that it is the cover-up that is worse than the crime. That lesson from Watergate has lasted since that time through several scandals. If ever there was a cover-up in its most obvious form, it is this allegation that agents of the Prime Minister were responsible for giving Mike Duffy instructions, up to the last seconds before he appeared on television, on precisely how he was to lie to the Canadian people.

We can think of cover-ups of various kinds, but I cannot think of a more obvious example of a blatant cover-up than that. It is bad enough that Senator Duffy did not tell the truth. When he received the \$90,000 cheque from Nigel Wright to repay, he did not acknowledge that but rather he claimed that he had acquired a mortgage from Royal Bank to pay back the money. I am certainly not defending Senator Duffy for that, but what is more important in this situation where we are dealing with the integrity of the Prime Minister and his office is not the fact that Mike Duffy, by his own admission, did not tell the truth, but rather that he was acting under the explicit orders of people in the Prime Minister's Office, or so, at least, it is alleged by Mr. Duffy.

Think of it. Agents of the Prime Minister instruct by email, in gruesome detail, the exact lines that Mike Duffy is to use on television to hide the fact that he received this money, allegedly, from the Prime Minister's chief of staff. He was to tell Canadians in a sombre serious way that he and his wife, who I believe was with him on television or at least she was involved in this story, had borrowed money from the Royal Bank to get a mortgage and he was using the proceeds of that money to pay back his debt. I believe that this is just one of many reasons, and an important reason in my view, why the Prime Minister has to come clean and why he has to testify under oath, so that we as Canadians and as parliamentarians can get to the bottom of this story and find out what indeed is the truth.

I do not think we know with certainty that agents of the Prime Minister did act in this way. That has been alleged. There are alleged to be emails. I am not certain that the proof is there. That is one more reason why the Prime Minister, who is responsible for his employees in his own office, has to testify on this and on many other matters.

Business of Supply

That is my small contribution as a former employee of the Royal Bank who feels a certain amount of outrage on this subject. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will now cede the floor to my colleague, the member for Vancouver Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): If the hon. member for Markham—Unionville has completed his remarks that is fair. We would now proceed with questions and comments to him and proceed through the sequence of speakers. The next slot on the speaking agenda may or may not be for the Liberal caucus. If the member would like to proceed in that way, that is fine. If he would like to continue with his remarks, that would also be acceptable.

Hon. John McCallum: I would be happy to take questions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the hon. Liberal member said he was a former bank employee, I would like him to comment on what he believes is right or wrong.

According to documents made public this month, the RCMP said:

...Harb could have put the Royal Bank of Canada "at risk" when he took out mortgages on homes in Cobden and Westmeath, properties he designated as his primary residences and used to claim living expenses from the Senate.

It further goes on to say:

In a sworn statement, RCMP Cpl. Greg Horton says Harb put a \$177,000 mortgage on the Cobden home on the same day in October 2007 that he sold a 99.99 per cent share of the property to Magdeline Teo, a diplomat from Brunei, for \$567,000.

Would the hon. member who used to work for the Royal Bank please comment on this? Does he think it is appropriate for a Liberal senator to do something like this?

• (1235)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, whether I worked for the Royal Bank of Canada or not is kind of irrelevant. I think a number of my colleagues have already suggested to this member that he can present the motions he wants and he can debate the subjects that he wants, but Mr. Harb is not and has not been for some time a member of the Liberal caucus.

The focus of the motion, in case my hon. colleague has not noticed, is on the Prime Minister. It is not on any particular senator or ex-senator. The focus is on the Prime Minister. He is the leader of our country. The idea is that he has to testify an oath so that Canadians can understand whether he is telling the truth, and so that they can have their confidence in his leadership restored or otherwise, depending on his testimony. That is the focus of our motion.

I would suggest that the NDP might keep its eye on the ball a little bit more.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Liberals' motion. Of course everyone is talking about the Prime Minister right now. Everyone is talking about whether a certain act was committed or not. Everyone wants to know what really happened. I understand and I agree that the Prime Minister has some explaining to do.

However, I have a question for my hon. Liberal colleague. All Canadians agree, and the Liberals and NDP agree, that what was

done on the other side of the House is simply unacceptable, why did the Liberals vote against the NDP motion to restrict the partisan activities and travel on the part of senators? That motion made a lot of sense and would have allowed us all, as parliamentarians, to move forward. Why did the Liberals vote against that motion and why are they proposing another one? If we cannot agree, how can we possibly move forward?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I very much liked the first part of my colleague's comments, because she agreed that it was important to focus on what the Prime Minister did and that he should testify publicly about this. She said that herself and I agree. Then she talked about things that have nothing to do with what we are discussing today. I would therefore suggest to her, as I suggested to her colleague, that she stick to the topic of debate currently before the House.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are pushing an open door with respect to the actual motion. We have asked literally dozens of questions with regard to the Prime Minister and his switching stories and switching versions of events from day to day.

There is something remarkable here. Let us all admit that the Prime Minister has done something quite remarkable. He has made Senator Duffy believable and somehow sympathetic. It is incredible that someone who has admitted to perhaps ripping off the taxpayer looks more believable than the Prime Minister does. I did not think it was actually possible.

The root cause of all of this is that a system has built up over the years from an era gone by that allows Liberal and Conservative senators alike to abuse the public's trust. He has to admit this, and I am sure that he does in private. It has happened. Some of them have gone to jail. He does not know Mac Harb now, but he certainly did when he was helping to fundraise millions of dollars for the Liberal Party of Canada. We have friends one moment, and sometimes they are not so friendly. Ask Nigel Wright.

Is not getting at the fundamental root of the Senate issue in this particular scandal, which the Prime Minister has himself in, relevant to today's debate? Does he somehow think he can parse these things

• (1240)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Before I go to the member for Markham—Unionville, I would just remind all hon. members to pay attention to the Chair for the signal when their time is complete. If they would like to make a presentation on the matter, the floor is available to all hon. members.

The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, a small suggestion or correction to my hon. colleague, it is not so much that Mike Duffy is more believable than the Prime Minister but I would perhaps admit that he is less unbelievable. There is a subtle distinction there.

Business of Supply

On the question of what is important, Senate reform versus the Prime Minister, I think both are important. There is nothing more fundamental to a country than the integrity of its leader. That is what is under debate right now. Senate reform is an important topic and it will have its day in court. However, right now, an increasing number of Canadians are concerned that their Prime Minister, the number one leader of this country, may not be telling them the truth.

I am not saying he is not; I am not saying he is. However, it is a fact that many Canadians are fearful that he is not. If there is a fear that the leader of the country is not telling the truth to the people of the country, that is a matter of primary importance. That is the focus of the motion. That is why we are demanding that the Prime Minister testify under oath to Canadians on this important topic.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague is completely right.

I would like to ask him what he thinks the attitude and behaviour of our colleagues on the government side should be. Why would they be part of the cover-up of the cover-up? Why would they continue to dodge questions in debates with us instead of trying to discover the truth themselves?

Why would our Conservatives colleagues not answer very basic questions, such as who was aware? Did they speak to these people to understand what happened exactly, or are they happy to not ask questions because they are afraid of the answers?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, let me start out on a positive note. I know Senator Plett, a real true-blue Conservative, former president of the Conservative Party, great loyalist to the Prime Minister. He was honest. He said that he wanted to see due process. He is voting against the government's motion in the Senate. He is one Conservative parliamentarian who has stood up to the boss and who has expressed his feelings honestly. This coming from a person who could not be more Conservative.

I know that the Conservative members of Parliament are feeling uncomfortable about this. They were particularly uncomfortable when the Prime Minister accused Nigel Wright of deception, because people across this country have been standing up for Nigel Wright and are embarrassed by the Prime Minister's statement.

I basically agree with my colleague that with a few exceptions, and I could name a few more, by and large the Conservative members of Parliament are not standing up for what is right for Canadians. They appear, at least in public, not to be pushing their leadership to come clean. I doubt very much they will support our motion that the Prime Minister should testify.

However, if the Prime Minister is telling the truth and he has nothing to hide, then why should the Conservative members of Parliament not support the Liberal motion?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin to speak to this motion, I would like to read the text.

This motion is not about what is going on in the Senate in terms of the Senate committee and due process. This motion is not about abolition of the Senate or reform of the Senate. This motion is very simple. It states:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the

repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

Why is this motion being brought to the floor? The motion is being brought to the floor because ever since the story began in May of this year, the story has changed. The Prime Minister stands up in the House, answers questions in Parliament, and his story continues to change. He says that nobody knew, and then we find out that all kinds of people knew, except the Prime Minister.

This motion pursues precisely what the Prime Minister said when he first ran for prime minister of this country. It is precisely what he said when he became leader of his political party. We are following through on what the Prime Minister promised when he came here, which was openness, ethics, and transparency.

This motion should never have had to come before the House. The Prime Minister should have done exactly what he always promised he would do. He should have said, "Here is the truth. Here is exactly what happened. I am going to go over this, I am going to be open, and I am going to produce whatever documents I have. I am going to let the people of Canada, Parliament, and everybody else decide, based on everything I have tabled in the House, because I am open, I am transparent, and I am committed to ethics." If he had done that, he would not have had to see this motion come forward now.

Let us look at what led to this whole thing and how we got here.

We are asking some important questions: What did the Prime Minister know, how much did he know, when did he know about the \$90,000 payment from former chief of staff Nigel Wright, who else knew, and how did it come about? Why did this whole issue of the payment of Mr. Duffy's expenses come about? How did this happen? That is what we want to find out. It is very simple stuff. The Prime Minister should answer the questions and let Parliament and the public decide.

As a result of all the changes to the story and digging himself deeper and deeper into a hole every time he stands to speak, only two out of 10 Canadians now believe the Prime Minister. It is not a very good thing for the Prime Minister of a "majority" government in the House that only two out of 10 Canadians believe him. That is just 20% of the public. That is pretty serious stuff.

Let us go down the road with this thing. On May 15 to May 19, the story broke. The issue is not about whether the senators tried to defraud or put in wrongful expense claims; that is not the issue. I do not think there is anybody in the House who does not believe that if somebody did something that was illegal, wrong, or fraudulent, that person should pay it back, come clean, and take the consequences. I do not think I have ever heard anybody say anything else on either side of the House on this issue. That is not the issue; the issue is how the Prime Minister got involved in the first place.

On May 15 when the story broke about the \$90,000 for Mr. Duffy and that the Prime Minister's chief of staff wrote the \$90,000 cheque to help Mr. Duffy pay off his expenses, the Prime Minister said he had full confidence in Nigel Wright as chief of staff. He lauded him for acting in the public interest. That was between May 15 and May 19. For five full days the Prime Minister stood in the House and said that same thing over and over.

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• (1245)

After the five days, the Prime Minister changed his tune. We would like to know what caused the Prime Minister to suddenly change his tune. It is a simple question. Did he get information he never had before? Did he suddenly decide that perhaps this was something he did not intend it to be? I do not know. We need to get the answers from the Prime Minister, not the sort of rhetoric that just tries to beat up on everybody else in the House without answering the question.

On May 16, the Prime Minister said, “Mr. Wright will not be resigning. Mr. Wright has the full support of the Prime Minister.”

On May 19, three days later, the Prime Minister put out a statement from the PMO, which said:

It is with great regret that I have accepted the resignation of Nigel Wright as my Chief of Staff. I accept that Nigel believed he was acting in the public interest, but I understand the decision he has taken to resign. I want to thank him for his tremendous contribution to our Government over the past two and a half years.

All of the other people who stood up and answered questions over the course of that time lauded Mr. Wright as a man of integrity, et cetera.

I am not finding fault with anybody; I am laying out what went on.

On June 5, the Prime Minister stated the following in the House of Commons:

...it was Mr. Wright who made the decision to take his personal funds and give those to Mr. Duffy so that Mr. Duffy could reimburse the taxpayers. Those were his decisions. They were not communicated to me or to members of my office.

Since then, of course, we have heard that there was a list of people in the Prime Minister's Office who knew what went on, so the Prime Minister on that day was not telling the truth at all.

We saw that he had Nigel Wright. We heard that he had Benjamin Perrin, formerly the Prime Minister's lawyer in the PMO. We heard that Chris Woodcock, director of issues management in the Prime Minister's Office, also was in on this. David van Hemmen, formerly Nigel Wright's assistant, was in on it. We had Benjamin Perrin, formerly the Prime Minister's personal lawyer in the PMO, who knew all about it. Patrick Rogers, legislative assistant to the Prime Minister at the time, knew about it. Jenni Byrne, former director of political operations for the Conservative Party and former deputy chief of staff to the Prime Minister, obviously knew about it. The late Senator Doug Finley, former campaign director for the Conservative Party, seemed to know about it. Then, this weekend at the Conservative convention, we found out that Senator Gerstein, who heads up the Conservative fund, also was in on this.

I am not asking anyone to impugn anyone else. I am just asking how everybody around the Prime Minister—his personal lawyer and everybody who worked for him—knew about it, but the Prime Minister did not know.

I mean, everybody on that list was, what, trying to trick the Prime Minister? Did they not tell their boss what they knew and not watch his back to say, “Gee whiz, boss, this is going on. I know how you feel about these things, and I know that once you know, you will put an end to it.”

Is that what I am being told of the Prime Minister, who insists that every word that comes out of his cabinet ministers' and backbenchers' mouths is vetted?

Inky Mark, a former member of Parliament with the Conservative Party, said that he was not allowed to put out a press release as a backbencher unless the Prime Minister okayed it.

Here is a Prime Minister who wants to keep his finger on everything, takes the pulse of everything, knows everything, and does not let anything go by him, yet there are 13 or 14 people, and tomorrow it may be 20 people, in his inner office, his inner circle, who knew, but the Prime Minister did not know.

I ask members to think about that. I think Canadians are thinking about it. Two out of 10 are saying that this does not ring true. It does not make sense. It does not compute at all when we look at it.

These are the questions that we want to get to the front. We want the Prime Minister, under oath, to tell us exactly what happened, because this is becoming more and more unbelievable. This is a fable. Most people think, “Good grief, I do not understand where this thing came from.” We want to know what the Prime Minister knew and when he knew it.

Mr. Duffy, at his press conference—and his lawyer was there—said that he had every piece of paper, had a paper trail, had everything right there in front of him, and that he would disclose what he wanted to do and would tell us what he knew. His story is different.

Mr. Duffy says that he has paper to back up his story. The Prime Minister should also be saying that he has paper to back up his story and that he will give it to us if Mr. Duffy is saying all these things. He should say that he will disclose because he has nothing to hide.

• (1250)

If he has nothing to hide, then he should disclose. What is the problem here, especially for someone who talks about openness, transparency, and ethics?

Now today we stand here debating a motion in Parliament, where we have three political parties. The members of one political party have decided they will not even speak. They will not even defend themselves. They will not even stand up to say anything at all about the issue.

How does that work? How do the members of the Conservative Party not have one word to say? How is it that the Conservatives feel that they are going to blackball this motion, blackball the debate in the House? That is not only proving they have been muzzled and that they have something to hide, but it is also disrespectful to Parliament itself and to what is going on in Parliament.

They are parliamentarians. They were elected by their constituents to come here and participate in Parliament and in the debates, and they are not doing it. The Conservatives are sitting there mute, blackballing a debate. This is something to be noted, and Canadians will note it, because now this issue is at the front of every Canadian's mind. Canadians want to know.

Business of Supply

People who voted for the Prime Minister, people who like him and believe in him, are all wondering what is going on here. The Prime Minister owes it to them, even if he does not think he owes it to any other Canadian or could not care less about other Canadians. However, he does owe it to his own people, who supported him, believed in him, and trusted him, to say, “Look, I am going to tell people what went on. I have nothing to hide. I said I would run on ethics and transparency, so here I am. I am going to be ethical, I am going to be transparent, I am going to be open. I’m going to disclose because I have nothing to hide.”

Even if the Prime Minister did not want to stand up and speak, he could have some of his own backbenchers or people from his cabinet stand up and speak for him. Table staff could say they have a list and get it out in the open. It is about getting it out in the open, but that is not happening.

We hear some people speaking out, muttering in corridors. We hear people saying certain things. We hear past members of the Conservative Party, such as Inky Mark, speaking out and saying how controlling everything was, and that was why he left. We have heard this from other people across the House who are now independent members. They left because they could not stand what was going on anymore, could not stand the control, the rigidity, yet amid all of that control and rigidity that caused people to walk away from the party, we have a Prime Minister who did not know what went on in his inner circle.

If I were writing a plot for a television show, that would never get off the ground unless I were writing science fiction. It would be unbelievable.

What we are asking for here in this House is simple. We are not saying Senator Duffy or any senator or MP who has defrauded should be able to stand up. We are not supporting that. I do not think I ever heard anybody in this House supporting that. We are saying to let the chips fall where they may, to let the RCMP investigate them, and if they have defrauded, let the consequences be heaped onto them and let them accept those consequences.

The Prime Minister is not immune from this issue. At the end of the day the Prime Minister, as the chief executive officer of this country, has to take responsibility for what went on around him.

First, the Prime Minister nominated these same senators.

Second—and I could be corrected—I do not believe that in the history of the Senate there have ever been senators appointed by any party to represent a province that everyone knew, because of their public celebrity status, they had not lived in for about 25 to 30 years. Is that an accident waiting to happen? Is that something that is going to make people suddenly rush off to find a way to prove that they lived somewhere else? Hence everything starts happening faster and faster, and suddenly all of the expenses have to be accounted for.

The Prime Minister therefore perhaps knew what he was doing with this little subterfuge of saying that although they did not live in that province and had never lived there, he was going to appoint them as senators for that province that they did not live in.

That was the first thing that the Prime Minister did. We could call it an error in judgment or call it what we want. We could be kind, or

we could say it was a calculated thing that the Prime Minister did. I am not saying. I do not know, because the Prime Minister will not tell, and there is a problem when one does not talk or speak out or tell: people form rumours. People suppose and people presume, because the truth is not coming out and the facts are not coming out.

● (1255)

That is the first thing. First and foremost, we have a Prime Minister who showed very poor judgment in the very instance. He, as the CEO of a country, has to take responsibility for his lack of judgment.

The second piece is that all the people around him, the 13 or 14 people in his trusted inner circle, went ahead and created this great big plot and the Prime Minister, in the middle of it, did not know. Come on. A CEO does not know what is going on around him. What kind of CEO is that, who does not know what is happening, who has 15 or 16 people around him deceiving him, not telling him, keeping him in the dark? That is not a good CEO. In corporate Canada that is not going to pass muster either.

Even if the Prime Minister did not know, and he continues to say he did not, the question then is what kind of CEO he is, who did not know what is going on. Then when he did know and he found out that all of the people around him in his trusted circle were deceiving him, what would he do? Would he not fire them all? No, many of them have gone on to be chiefs of staff to his cabinet ministers. This is the third strike against the CEO who does not know how to take the right steps to deal with whatever is going on around him. These are the questions we are asking and that Canadians are asking.

First the Prime Minister said he thought Mr. Wright was great. Then he said he accepted his resignation very reluctantly. Then all of a sudden about a week ago, the Prime Minister said this man had two horns and 12 tails and he was the worst possible thing and so on. How do we get from “I trust this man, he is a good guy, he made a mistake, I am reluctantly accepting his resignation”, to where he said this guy was obviously the devil in disguise? None of these things make sense.

I am trying to talk common sense here. I have been trying to answer questions I get asked in my constituency: how come, why, why not? Canadians are asking it of their CEO who owes them an explanation. Even if he believes that Parliament does not count and he does not owe us any explanation, he owes it to them, if only for one reason: he promised them openness, transparency and ethics, and that has not happened.

We are just telling him to be as good as his word, to tell us he has ethics, to tell us he is transparent. CEOs in corporate Canada today suddenly get kicked out because of this kind of stuff going on, with a less onerous burden of proof than the current Prime Minister has, and yet they get moved out. No one in corporate Canada would allow for this. The buck stops with the CEO. The CEO is responsible for what goes on in the company, the management and the staff.

Even if the Prime Minister were absolutely blameless, really did not know, he has to answer for that incompetence. If the Prime Minister did know, he has to answer for the deception and subterfuge.

Business of Supply

At the end of the day we see him refusing to be open, refusing to be transparent, refusing to table and having had Parliament force him to come and do so under oath. That is not pretty to have to force someone to come and fess up under oath because we do not believe he would fess up if he were not under oath.

This is not good. There is something rotten in the state of Denmark and we just want to get to the bottom of it.

Finally, we are seeing how true it all was when Sir Walter Scott said, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive”.

• (1300)

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of State (Science and Technology, and Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us focus this discussion after that aimless intervention. Here is what we know. We have a Liberal senator in a penitentiary. We have another one maybe headed there and we have this motion, which is a small, rather petty exercise in addressing the big issues. Addressing the transparency and accountability of the Senate itself, something we have been championing now for seven years is asking for elected senators and the appointment of those senators, making sure they would run if they had the opportunity to, and asking our opposition colleagues if they would join in that exercise to make the Senate more democratic in that reform.

Coming from that diminished party, what we find out through the motion is that over the course of decades Liberals failed to deliver on the reforms. The question is simple. Is the member prepared to back the reforms that this government is proposing for meaningful change to the Senate? Liberals had decades and decades to do it, unfortunately. I think that is something on which the NDP can agree with me. I would like to hear the member's answer to that question.

• (1305)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I began focusing on the motion. Now I am getting a question from the hon. member across the way—

Hon. Mr. Rickford: Focus on the senator in prison.

Hon. Hedy Fry: If he would allow me to answer it, I would be delighted. When he finishes muttering in the corner, I will answer the question.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): I have got it now, Mr. Speaker. The misspending and abuse of taxpayers dollars is not an issue for the Liberals. That is clear from the member's speech. The Liberals want Canadians to skip to the end of the book, to the last chapter. They should just read the last chapter. They should not read all the chapters before that about the story. I finally understand.

I also finally understand the Liberal slogan of hope and hard work. Let the NDP do all the hard work and hope that Canadians do not notice the complete absence of the Liberal leader on many files; so I thank the member for enlightening me about that.

The member speaks about a mute party. I know a mute leader in this House. I know a couple of mute leaders in this House, and they are not our leader.

Does the member actually think Canadians will buy this weak motion after months, nay years, of the Liberals burying their heads in the sand on the issue of the Senate?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been in government since 2006. Seven years later they have made no changes to the Senate, which they ran on and said they would do. Why? It is because there is a constitution that governs reform to the Senate. They tried to make an end run with some of those reforms.

I was on the committee that was looking at the Senate bill from the government earlier on when it took office, and the constitutional expert said, “You cannot do this”.

Second, the new member of the New Democratic Party in the House asked a question about the last 20 years, obviously not aware of the history of Charlottetown and of Meech Lake where a referendum went to Canadians about a triple-E Senate, and Canadians said no; so now we move on.

We heard Canadians say no. We did not move on this. The Prime Minister said he would do it. He did not go to the provinces to discuss it. He did not try to get the seven provinces with 50% of the population to agree to reforms. In fact, most of the provinces, with the exception of a Conservative province, said, “That is not on our front burner, people; we have all kinds of other things we want to talk about”.

Now, let us talk about Senate reform. This is not about Senate reform. This is a motion to say we would like to hear from the Prime Minister what really happened. I would like to hear questions on that.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member opposite would like to hear questions designed for what she wants to be asked, but we need to hear from the member whether she supports Senate reform and whether her party supports Senate reform and whether it will support the government's initiative to help that Senate reform happen.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I have a simple answer, Mr. Speaker: yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it makes me laugh to hear the Conservatives and the Liberals defending the Senate, because their argument does not stand up. We also moved a motion about that in the House. They are saying that we need Senate reform whereas we think that we should get rid of the Senate.

We believe that, at the very least, senators should not participate in their party caucus. That is the bare minimum. They should not participate in fundraising campaigns for their political parties. We are talking about expense scandals.

Senators are supposed to be studying legislation in the Senate, which is known as the house of second thought. They are supposed to study legislation. At the same time, they are supposed to represent the regions and minorities. However, governments have senators fundraising for their political parties. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives are guilty of that.

Why did the Liberals vote against our motion, which perhaps could have brought about a small change in the Senate? The leaders of these political parties would have told senators that they must stop fundraising for their political parties and do their job in the Senate.

I would like an answer from the member. It is not enough to say that they have a motion. We need to hear from them on this. The Senate is a problem and it should be abolished.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I think I also answered that question twice in my little question segment here.

I said I believe we cannot reform or do away with the Senate unless we have the agreement of 50% of Canadians from seven provinces. That is clear. That is in the Constitution. The NDP in the House may wish to chuck the Constitution and ignore it, but that is the truth.

Also, the triple-E Senate and changes in the Senate came about in two major accords, the Meech Lake accord and the Charlottetown accord. It was taken to Canadians. Canadians voted against it.

Therefore, let us talk about what we do now. Do we just say that Canadians do not know what they are talking about and that the Constitution is full of it, so let us just do our own thing? That is what the NDP would have us believe in the House. That is not so. There are rules, and senators who break the rules should have to pay for it.

There is a Constitution. Instead of casting aspersions on each other and playing political games, let us look at the Constitution and together find a way, in the House, to reform the Senate under its constitutional mandate for reform. Those are the questions we need to talk about if we really want change, not the cheap little partisan tricks that go on.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems that, should this motion pass, there are multiple possible outcomes of having the Prime Minister testify under oath. One of those outcomes is that what the Prime Minister has been saying in the House was true with respect to what he knew. If that is the case, then what we have is a culture within the Prime Minister's Office where it is apparently okay to give the Prime Minister plausible deniability while committing potentially criminal acts to buy the silence of a sitting parliamentarian. If that is the outcome of this inquiry, is it still worth doing that? Is that a message Canadians are entitled to know?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, Canadians are entitled to know. If it turns out that none of this is true and that the Prime Minister indeed did not know, was blind and deaf, and had everybody around him deceiving him and plotting around him, then the Prime Minister should ask himself what sort of PMO he runs. His own competence comes into question here.

At the end of the day, either way, regardless of where the chips fall when we hear the information, Canadians need to know the truth, Parliament needs to know the truth and the Prime Minister needs to be accountable for whatever that truth is.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Before we resume debate, I would like to share a couple of cautions with members.

Business of Supply

First is the issue of relevance. It has come up a couple of times this morning whether the questions have been relevant to the matter that is before the House. I would ask all hon. members to co-operate in this regard.

Second, as all hon. members know, there are certain things that are not acceptable parliamentary language in this place. In today's debate, over the past hour or so, several times members have drifted very close to the line of saying that someone is not telling the truth or that someone has said something that is untrue. I appreciate that this is a fine line to tread today, but I would again ask the co-operation of all members in that regard, that they only use language that is acceptable in this place.

The final piece of this is to also remind all hon. members that they cannot do indirectly what they cannot do directly. Therefore, if there is a statement you cannot make directly you cannot say "People are saying" and then make the statement as though it is not your words but someone else's.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I want to let you know that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of the motion. It is encouraging to see the Liberals finally taking some action. I was disappointed when my friends refused to support the NDP motion we put before the House to limit Senate partisan activity. The NDP motion would have limited Senate partisan activity funded by Canadians, which would have held the Senate accountable today, not next week or next month or after a hearing or at some point in the future. However, our friends in the House did not deem that topic important enough to support.

Moving on to the motion before us today put forward by our Liberal colleagues, it is interesting that they have put the motion in front of the House now. We know that last week alone, the leader of the official opposition, the leader of the New Democratic Party, and our Prime Minister had 43 interactions, 43 exchanges of questions, on this PMO scandal, while the leader of the Liberal Party used only three of his party's 45 possible questions.

We all know that it is the NDP that will continue to use all means possible, all means available to us, to ensure that we are keeping the government accountable and are doing the work that needs to be done on behalf of Canadians to ensure transparency and accountability in this House.

Whatever the Minister of Foreign Affairs said, I could not hear, because his microphone was not on. However, I will assure him, once again, that it will be the NDP that holds the government to account.

Hon. John Baird: I was heckling a Liberal, by the way, because he was calling you nuts.

Business of Supply

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaesan: I appreciate the Minister of Foreign Affairs for not supporting the Liberals who are heckling me, apparently. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification that was provided to me.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the current Conservative government need to stop changing their story. That is what we are asking for, and that is what Canadians are asking for. They want them to come clean to Canadians by answering all the questions to the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister himself about his involvement with the Senate scandal, Senator Duffy, Senator Wallin, and any of the senators.

They need to start by releasing all related documents that are available. So far what we have are documents and information leaked by Senator Duffy. To be honest, I prefer the information coming straight from the horse's mouth. That means directly from the source.

The Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office have been very busy trying to cover up their own alleged corruption, while the Liberals have appeared totally disinterested until, all of sudden, now.

Meanwhile, both Conservatives and Liberals continue to vote against sensible New Democrat proposals to restrict Senate partisan activity, partisan travel, partisan fundraising, and partisan activity overall. That is what we tried to propose, and our friends across the aisle on both the Conservative team and the Liberal team opposed that proposition.

Canadians are tired of an unelected, unaccountable, and under-investigation Conservative and Liberal Senate. That is why New Democrats advocate that the only real solution to this entire problem, this \$90-million or \$100-million boondoggle, whatever we are going to call it, is to abolish the Senate. That is the NDP's position. It has been the NDP's position for a very long time, and it will continue to be the NDP's position.

The NDP will continue to use all means available to us to continue to keep the government accountable.

There is one thing I want to add. When the leader of the official opposition asks questions in this House, we do not really get answers.

When I speak to people in my community of Scarborough—Rouge River, they are actually starting to get irritated and annoyed about what is happening in the Senate. They ask me questions, and I do not really have answers for them, because, to be honest, we do not get answers from the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's Office, his parliamentary secretary, his cabinet ministers, or anybody on the Conservative side. Nobody provides real answers.

The same questions the leader of the official opposition, the leader of the NDP, put forth in the House of Commons to the Prime Minister are the same questions I am being asked in my community in Scarborough.

• (1315)

People want to know the answers to simple questions. Was Nigel Wright dismissed, or did he resign? That is a pretty simple employment question. There must be paperwork to back up either

one of those claims. It is a pretty simple question, but we cannot get a straight answer from the Conservatives.

How many cheques are there in total? People are asking me these questions, and I do not have any answers.

How many people in the Prime Minister's Office knew about the Duffy cover-up, and who are they? We have heard that there were a "few". We have heard several, nine, 13, and 14. We do not know. Once again, we are looking for truth. We are looking for transparency. We are looking for accountability. Canadians really do deserve better.

Another question is why the Prime Minister claimed that only Nigel Wright knew about the cover-up. Now, of course, he has changed his story. Now a few people in the Prime Minister's Office knew about it. How many are a few? Usually, in traditional language usage, a few is more than two, so it could be three, but we do not know, because he also said several. What does that mean?

Another question is whether the Conservative Party was ever going to pay for Mike Duffy's fraudulently claimed expenses. Do the Conservatives consider Duffy's and Wallin's expenses inappropriate? We have heard both sides, whether they think they were appropriate or were not appropriate. Mr. Speaker, you know that in *Hansard*, both of those comments are available for Canadians to find.

What I am getting at is that Canadians deserve the real story. We, as elected members of Parliament, are the 308 representatives of the millions of Canadians across the country. We deserve to get the truth so that we can take that back to our constituents. We are not getting that. We are getting multiple versions of stories.

All I am asking for, on behalf of my constituents, is one story, the truth, that is the only story we hear. That is all I want: one truth; one story.

Another question constituents in my community are asking is whether I know when and how often the Prime Minister actually spoke with Nigel Wright. I do not have an answer for that, either. I really do not have answers to give my constituents. They are asking me this when I am at the grocery store or at a community event. When I am celebrating Diwali with my constituents, they are talking to me about the Senate scandal.

They are asking me questions about what is happening and about how the government is wasting Canadians' money and not using it for important things, such as ensuring that our young people are getting jobs and access to education. They are saying that average Canadians are not getting access to jobs, because the government is not creating jobs here in Canada. It is a government that supports jobs being shipped out of the country, yet it is covering up a scandal of a cheque for more than \$90,000 or \$100,000 and is spending extra money making up different versions of stories.

All Canadians want is that the truth come out and that their own lives and the lives of all Canadians improve. We are not getting that.

There are many questions my constituents are asking me. They want to know how many lawyers were involved in the Prime Minister's Office's cover-up of the Duffy affair. Who were the lawyers?

Business of Supply

On Wednesday last week, a cabinet minister defended the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, Nigel Wright, who played a central role in the Senate scandal and the PMO's orchestrated cover-up. He said:

I know Nigel Wright to be a person of good faith, of competence, with high ethical standards.

Yet we saw the Prime Minister say that Nigel Wright acted on his accord and had nothing to do with anything.

Who was that minister? It was the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Multiculturalism.

• (1320)

I believe that in opposition, we need to have true propositions to actually improve the Houses of this Parliament, and that is what the NDP is doing. That is what we will continue to do.

• (1325)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many things I could say. Suffice it to say that the distortion of reality in terms of the member's comments about the Liberal Party's objection to what is taking place could not be further from the truth.

This is an issue we have been pursuing quite aggressively since day one. That is the reality. The member knows that.

Having said that, the Liberal Party wants, and I would suggest that Canadians from coast to coast to coast want, this Prime Minister to be sitting in his place making a declaration, under oath, as to the full truth of what he knows. That is the essence of the motion we are talking about today.

I find it strange that we have had only one Conservative speak on this motion. I am wondering if the member might want to provide comment as to why she believes that only one Conservative member has chosen to try to defend the Prime Minister.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned that the Liberal Party has been involved in this Senate scandal discussion and debate since day one. Were they? Where were they?

Maybe they were involved since day one, because they are in the Senate, and they are part of this whole debacle. They are part of everything. They have their own senator who is under investigation. They were part of this since day one. They are part of the scandal itself.

Since the official opposition brought this forward in this House, why has the leader of the Liberal Party used only three of his possible 45 questioning opportunities to talk about this issue in the House of Commons?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, something in particular in my colleague's remarks stood out for me. Our constituents are asking serious questions, and "ethics" is the word that comes up most often because they are wondering who is going to pay for this. Once again, there will be no accountability from the Prime Minister or his office. It is absolutely unacceptable that yet another shameful scandal is unfolding, a scandal that calls into question the credibility of every elected official, at every level.

However, nothing is being done by the Prime Minister's Office, which is now at the centre of this situation.

I would like my colleague to speak more about that. Our constituents are concerned and want accountability.

[*English*]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and his passion, because just like Canadians, he is very passionate.

He is right when he says that Canadians are smart. I believe that Canadians are smart and that they will not put up with the government pulling the wool over their eyes for much longer. They are smart, and they know what transparency means. They know what accountability means.

The government, and especially the cabinet, which is the government, is there to be accountable to Canadians. The member asked who is going to pay. It is, once again, Canadians who are going to pay. It is everybody in this country who is paying taxes. Those are the people who are paying for this scandal, this cover-up, and everything that is happening. Those Canadians are the ones who are footing the bill for the government to pull the wool over their eyes. Canadians are smarter than that. They know.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the motion before us and to show my support. Although I do not find that it solves all the problems related to the Senate scandal that we have been dealing with in recent days, weeks and even months, it is still a step in the right direction.

Before getting to the heart of the matter and speaking directly to the motion, I would like to go over a few important facts. First, three senators and former members of the Conservative caucus, Patrick Brazeau, Pamela Wallin and Mike Duffy, are currently under investigation by the RCMP in relation to the scandal involving unjustified expenses. These senators claimed expenses and were reimbursed for their unjustified expenses with taxpayers' money.

These three senators now sit as independents and are accusing the Prime Minister's Office of throwing them under the bus to cover up the scandal. In the Duffy affair, the media discovered that the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, Nigel Wright, gave Mr. Duffy a cheque for \$90,000 to repay the expenses he owed. According to Mr. Duffy, not only was the Prime Minister aware of this situation but the Conservative Party also gave the senator \$13,560 to pay his legal fees. In other words, donations from tax payers were used to pay for the legal fees Mr. Duffy incurred as a result of wrongdoing that the Prime Minister condemns. The Conservative Party therefore allegedly paid the legal fees of someone who is being charged with offences that are, according to the Prime Minister himself, unforgiveable and unjustifiable.

Business of Supply

Then, the Prime Minister denied any involvement in the affair and claimed that he was not aware of what was happening, saying that his former chief of staff, Mr. Wright was entirely at fault. Canadians are not stupid. The problem here is that more and more versions of the story are being told and the more versions that are told, the more they contradict each other and contradict what the Prime Minister originally said. On a number of occasions, the Prime Minister had to retract and rephrase his statement, using terms that were more vague or more specific, depending on the context, so that he would not be found guilty of misleading the House.

People are no longer relying solely on what the Prime Minister or Conservative members are saying. They have contradicted themselves far too many times. It reeks of a scandal, not only in the Senate but also in the PMO and within the Conservative Party.

The motion therefore tries to put a positive spin on this scandal by proposing that we try to discover the truth about it, particularly about the Prime Minister's involvement, and that we hear the Prime Minister's version of what happened—perhaps a more official version that would prevent him from going back on what he said from one day to the next.

We believe that this is necessary and that it would be worthwhile to proceed in the manner indicated in the motion because we have tried other ways and they are clearly not working. They are not working for the members in the House who have been asking the Prime Minister and the Conservatives questions day after day, week after week and month after month without ever getting a clear answer. I myself have asked dozens of questions about the Senate scandal and the Prime Minister's involvement in it.

I have several examples. I asked whether the Prime Minister or a member of his staff asked Carolyn Stewart Olsen to step down from the Senate committee responsible for examining expenses. The question was very clear and very precise. A yes or no answer would have been appropriate, perhaps even a sentence or two to explain. However, I got neither a yes nor a no; instead, I got attempts to change the subject and accusations that the NDP was trying to victimize senators. Did that answer the question I asked? Not at all. The only answer I got was that my question had already been answered, that it was time to move on to another subject, that nobody was very interested in the scandal and that we would be better off talking about something else. Naturally, talking about something else would be in the Conservatives' best interest.

• (1330)

Here is another example of a very simple, very direct question that should have received a very simple, very direct answer. With respect to Carolyn Stewart Olsen's expenses related to her residence, expenses that are certainly confusing because we do not know if it was her primary or secondary residence, we asked the Prime Minister whether he considered those expenses inappropriate.

The words are all simple. The numbers are simple. They could have told me that the expenses were inappropriate or appropriate. That could have happened, but it certainly did not. Those are just two examples among hundreds. Those were clear and precise questions that could have been answered with a yes or a no. Unfortunately, they tried to change the subject and avoided

answering the questions. That is the attitude they demonstrate in the House as well as toward journalists.

I would like to quote from an article in *Le Devoir* about the Prime Minister's attitude and his self-professed transparency. The article said:

The Prime Minister did not make himself available to the press at the end of the Calgary convention on Saturday.... [That was the convention that took place last weekend.] Reporters approached Stephen Harper as he was leaving the room and asked him to explain the second cheque written to Mike Duffy. Mr. Harper did not answer. People in his entourage were astounded.

That is just one example, but there are others. Journalists themselves are having a hard time making sense of this and getting clear answers from the Prime Minister.

Once again—I am repeating myself—that is why I think this motion can help shed some light on this Senate scandal and the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office in all of this.

Unfortunately, there are many conflicting versions. When we manage to get answers, they are not always consistent. For example, the Prime Minister said that Nigel Wright resigned. He later said that Nigel Wright was dismissed, so he could avoid controversy and say that he was no longer on his team. It does not really matter whether he was dismissed or he resigned. The fact is, we are still in the dark.

Another example of contradiction is when we hear that no one knew about the cheques. It turns out that maybe four people and then even thirteen people were aware. How can we trust answers like that when day after day new facts and new evidence come to light that force the Prime Minister to change his version of the facts?

Another example not directly related to the scandal itself is the fact that in 2006, the Prime Minister said that he would not be appointing senators and indeed had no intention of doing so. As of today, he has appointed 57 senators. This is just another example that shows how difficult it is to give any credibility to what the Conservatives say in the House about the Senate spending scandal and the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office in that scandal.

People need clear and direct answers. This is what we are trying to give them by asking questions, day after day, in the House of Commons or by moving motions.

The motion from the Liberals, however, has its limits. The NDP proposed a motion a few days ago. This motion sought not only to stop this type of spending, but also to prevent senators from engaging in partisan spending. I have received several emails from people in my riding calling for action on this issue. Obviously, the NDP's position on the Senate is clear. Our preferred option is abolition. Again, I have received hundreds of letters in the mail from my constituents asking me to work on having the Senate abolished—not just because of the Senate spending scandal, but also for several other reasons.

Yes, the NDP is still in favour of abolishing the Senate. However, we do not have to wait for the NDP to be in power to take action and finally bring about real change in the Senate. In the meantime, there are other things we can do. The NDP motion was a very tangible proposal that sought to establish more transparency and accountability. It was intended to ensure that taxpayers' money was not spent for partisan purposes, such as covering the senators' travel expenses.

I think I have clearly explained my position on this issue. I find it unfortunate that we need to move such a motion in the House. One would think that the government would act on its own to give us a clear and credible version of events during the kind of crisis we are going through right now in terms of the Senate spending scandal and the Prime Minister's involvement in the whole affair. However, we now have no choice but to introduce such a motion.

I hope that the Conservatives will now act to ensure credibility and transparency.

• (1335)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting that at the Conservative convention last weekend, we saw individual high-profile ministers like the former minister of immigration, who is now Minister of Employment and Social Development, praising Mr. Wright and just a few days earlier the Prime Minister was driving the bus over Mr. Wright.

Now there is an important matter before the House that will come to a vote, which calls upon the Prime Minister to testify under oath. Liberals are trying to find out if the Prime Minister has any friends on that side who are prepared to stand and say something on the motion.

Would the member want to comment as to why it is important for government members stand and either defend the Prime Minister or give an indication as to what they believe, or are we to take their silence as an admission of guilt that they just want this issue to disappear?

• (1340)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Right now, I am having a hard time putting myself in the shoes of the Conservative members or ministers. Honestly, if I were in their shoes, I would be very uncomfortable and I would not know what to say. What do you do when, day after day, what your leader, your Prime Minister says turns out to be only more or less the truth?

Do you stand by some versions of the story, knowing that the story might change the next day? Do you keep quiet, hoping that this will go away? Those are all desperate actions, but I hope they will ultimately come up with a clear, straightforward and credible version of the story.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to ask a Conservative member my question but, unfortunately, they are not rising to speak.

However, I heard one of them this morning. It was the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister himself. In response

Business of Supply

to the questions from the NDP to his leader, he said he was "obliged to answer". He even said that he felt our questions were very relevant. However, despite all that, he is not providing any answers and neither is his leader. The questions are relevant and simple, but they are not answering them.

What message does the hon. member think this is sending to Canadians?

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

In fact, I myself have asked a number of questions in this House about that issue. When the answer I receive has nothing to do with my question, I am told that the question has been answered before.

Why not take 30 seconds to answer the question again? When the Conservatives are trying to avoid giving an answer, change the subject and duck the question completely or discredit the person asking the question, Canadians listening to the answers are certainly not reassured. Simply telling the truth would take the debate much further and would let Canadians trust the stories we are hearing in this House. However, that is not the case at all, and that is unfortunate.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise and ask my colleague a question.

We are now debating what is going on in the Prime Minister's Office. It is in the Conservatives' interest to say that the Senate is still the problem.

I want to ask my colleague if she agrees with me that questions remain with respect to the possible criminal involvement of the Prime Minister's Office.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that clarification.

In fact, we are not just facing one problem here; we are facing two.

Basically, some senators made claims for inappropriate expenses, which is one of the issues before us. However, there is another issue that is related but not the same, and that issue is the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office in a Senate reimbursement and expenses scandal.

Therefore, this is not just a debate about senators who made claims for inappropriate expenses. It is also a debate about this Prime Minister's involvement and his inability to provide transparent and coherent answers to questions about the situation.

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the public hear words like "extortion", "bribery", "cover-up", "deception" and "lying", we have an obligation and a duty to find out the truth about this emerging political and possibly criminal crisis involving the highest officials in the Government of Canada. We are now in a situation where it is alleged that a wholesale cover-up was deployed to deceive Canadians about a payoff to a sitting senator, a payoff meant to conceal information from the Canadian people and to obstruct a forensic audit.

Business of Supply

The rule of law still applies to the highest office-holders in the land. No one is above the law. We need to know the truth about the \$90,000 payoff to Senator Duffy. We need to know about what involvement others had, including the role, if any, of the Prime Minister in this cover-up. We need to know the truth, and so far we have had little.

That is why I support the motion before the House, which reads:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

How did we get to this point? What events transpired that led to allegations of bribery and cover-up? What events led to this crisis that is now consuming the Conservative government and the Prime Minister?

Well, this all started in 2009. The "old Duff", as he likes to call himself, had waged a decades long effort to get into the Senate. He waged this effort, all the while acting as a journalist, and I emphasize "acting as a journalist". It was clear and it was well known that Mike Duffy really wanted to be a senator and he was prepared to do almost anything to achieve that end. He found favour with the current Prime Minister when his *Mike Duffy Live* show morphed into a Conservative propaganda outlet. Mike Duffy really did "earn" the Senate seat with biased reporting that more often than not favoured the Conservative Party. Therefore, when the Prime Minister had a vacancy in Prince Edward Island, he appointed Mike Duffy, and the outrage back home on the island was felt immediately. Islanders were appalled that an individual living in Ontario for some 40 years was to be selected to represent Prince Edward Island in the Senate. The rest, as they say, was history.

Mike Duffy, once appointed, became an ATM to the Prime Minister. He travelled around the country raising very large amounts of money for the Conservatives, and he was good at it. People flocked to see the "old Duff" because he was a well-known celebrity and a media person. He viciously and gleefully insulted our premier. The Prime Minister was no doubt very pleased with the bags of money he was raising. It was only when questions were raised about inappropriate expenses charged by Senator Duffy and when questions re-emerged about his true residence that things began to unravel. Soon, one of the most successful fundraisers for the Conservative Party, Mike Duffy, became a serious liability because of his expenses.

That is the start of this whole sordid affair. It was that day in 2009 when the Prime Minister appointed Mike Duffy, who was living in Ontario for 40 years, as a senator for P.E.I.

However, why should we be surprised at that appointment, a slap in the face to the people of Prince Edward Island? The degree of disdain the government has for Prince Edward Island is clear, and this is but one example. Immediately upon the Conservatives' election in 2006, the first thing the Prime Minister did was to cancel a deal that would have provided for a third power cable between P.E.I. and New Brunswick, something that would be very important for our energy security and economic development, and the attack on Prince Edward Island continues to this day.

● (1345)

It was the Prime Minister who made cuts to the federal civil service at the rate of 4.8% across the country and double that rate in Prince Edward Island. It was the Prime Minister who cut district offices for veterans, leaving Prince Edward Island as the only province with no district office for veterans. It was the Prime Minister who cut the immigration office in Prince Edward Island, leaving it as the only province in Canada without an office for citizenship and immigration. It was the Prime Minister who cut the counter service for Revenue Canada in Prince Edward Island, leaving my province as the only one in Canada where a taxpayer could not speak to a live person through counter service at Revenue Canada. It was the Prime Minister who gutted the EI system, hurting Atlantic Canadian families and harming seasonal businesses on Prince Edward Island. Also, it was the Prime Minister who appointed Mike Duffy, from Kanata, to the Senate.

I am amazed to witness the performance by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. Day in and day out, he stands in the House of Commons defending the indefensible and acting as if his boss is somehow a victim in this whole affair. Does he not know it was his boss, the Prime Minister, who was the source of all this mess? Does he think Canadians will forget that it was the Prime Minister who appointed Senators Duffy, Wallin and Brazeau and who also appointed Nigel Wright, among others? No, Canadians will not forget.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly claimed in the House that he knew nothing about the payoff to Mike Duffy. He says that he was not involved. Senator Duffy is now suggesting otherwise. Senator Duffy has presented some explosive allegations about a cover-up involving officials in the Prime Minister's Office and perhaps even the Prime Minister himself. Nigel Wright, the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, who by all accounts was considered by most Conservatives and others as an honourable man, is now suddenly not the chief of staff for the Prime Minister but rather the chief deceiver, at least according to the Prime Minister.

I concede that under normal circumstances when a Prime Minister speaks on a particular matter, we should assume he or she is telling the truth, and why would we not? The Prime Minister is, after all, the holder of the most senior position in the Canadian government. Under normal circumstances we would take the Prime Minister at his word. These, however, are not normal times. There are far too many questions about this ethics scandal and, to date, the Prime Minister has not answered questions to the satisfaction of the House, nor to the satisfaction of Canadians. The fact that we find ourselves questioning whether the Prime Minister is telling the truth is, frankly, quite troubling.

I do not know if the Prime Minister was in on the organized cover-up with respect to the \$90,000 payoff to Mike Duffy, yet day in and day out, when facing direct and clear questions from the Liberals and the New Democrats about the cover-up, we hear an evolving and changing story from the Prime Minister. Instead of direct answers, the Prime Minister is evasive and deploys rehearsed and changing talking points, all which seek to sidestep accountability and give rise to suspicion.

Statements by Members

I concede that it is possible the Prime Minister could be telling the truth. The Prime Minister's comportment in this regard, however, his unwillingness to be direct and forthright when asked direct questions about his involvement in a possible cover-up, gives rise to doubt.

Are we to believe the Prime Minister knew nothing of the cover-up and the potential bribe of a sitting parliamentarian, a cover-up meant to protect the Prime Minister? Are we to believe that a prime minister who rules with an iron fist, who micromanages his cabinet members, who holds court over the vast majority of the operation of the Government of Canada, who, according to a recent book by Paul Wells, ordered the production of a stamp at Canada Post, is suddenly a prime minister unbothered with the minute details of daily government life?

• (1350)

Is it believable that his chief of staff, Nigel Wright, was operating alone as the Prime Minister first suggested? Is it possible that all of this happened without the knowledge of the Prime Minister?

It is also possible that there was no moon landing. However, the evidence is overwhelming that there was.

• (1355)

Mr. Marc Garneau: You can take it from me there was.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie is offering some assurances in this regard. I believe we should take him at his word.

This is the reality we confront today. We are being asked to believe that the most controlling, partisan, divisive Prime Minister in Canadian history did not know what was happening in his own office.

The Prime Minister could be telling the truth, but the degree to which he is obfuscating and sidestepping basic questions in the House is troubling. It is for that reason I think the Prime Minister should finally clear the air and do so under oath.

This so-called tough on crime obsessed Conservative Party must know that it is illegal to bribe public officials. Moreover, it is illegal to bribe a parliamentarian.

Canadians have a right to expect that leaders tell the truth. Canadians have a right to know who was involved in the \$90,000 cover-up. Canadians have a right to know if hush money was provided to Mike Duffy as part of an organized effort to deceive Canadians.

Like most Canadians, I am deeply troubled by what is happening in Ottawa and the conduct of certain elements within the Conservative Party. I know the vast majority of the Conservative backbench are decent, hard-working individuals. They work day in and day out to do their best for Canadians. I often disagree with them on matters, but respect a great many of them. It is difficult not to have empathy for some of them, as they are perhaps being unfairly lumped into a scandal reaching the highest level of their government.

Some Conservative backbenchers are rightly ashamed of what is happening. I know many of them are also troubled with the abuse of power and the control exercised by non-elected officials in the Prime Minister's Office.

I know some Conservative MPs are troubled by the hyper-partisanship that exists and the poor example of the Prime Minister in this regard. I know the Conservatives are troubled by suggestions of fraud during elections and the notion that winning at all costs is considered par for the course. I know some Conservatives are troubled by the use of party funds to pay the legal fees of people who are now considered persona non grata by the Prime Minister. I know the Conservatives are troubled by the rejection of evidence and science in the making of public policy. I know some Conservatives are appalled by the cancelling of the census. I know some Conservatives are fed up with the personal attacks on people simply because they disagree on an issue. I know that many are fed up with the divide and conquer approach to politics.

We must end the notion that the Prime Minister should only care about people who vote for him and his party. For a democracy like ours to truly function and be healthy, it requires opposition and openness. It requires back and forth debate where we actually listen to one another. It requires us asking tough questions at times. Above all, it requires a degree of honesty.

When I started my career in law about 20-some years ago, a senior partner came into my office and told me that the two most important things I should bear in mind throughout my legal career that would serve me well were accessibility and integrity.

It is time for the Prime Minister to tell Canadians the truth. I hope some members of the Conservative backbench will meet the challenge and support this motion.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for government orders has expired. The hon. member for Charlottetown will have five minutes remaining in his speech when this matter returns following question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

OUR BENIGN DICTATORSHIP

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in 1996 a young politician wrote an essay entitled “Our Benign Dictatorship”.

It included these statements:

Many of Canada's problems stem from a winner-take-all style of politics...

Our parliamentary government creates a concentrated power structure out of step with other aspects of society.

...we persist in structuring the governing team like a military regiment under a single commander with almost total power to appoint, discipline and expel subordinates.

Countries governed for a long period by a centre party drift into cronyism, corruption, cynicism and a period of chaos....

A governing party enjoying an indefinite lease on power encourages its supporting interests to become closely interwoven with the state. This may entail... corruption on a grand scale.

Statements by Members

Those 1996 quotes were written by the man who is our Prime Minister today.

* * *

**NATIONAL PANCREATIC CANCER CANADA
FOUNDATION**

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Pancreatic Cancer Canada Foundation began operating in 2005 as The Dick Aldridge Pancreatic Cancer Foundation, honouring the memory of the former Toronto Argonaut who died of pancreatic cancer in 2004.

To date, the foundation has donated over \$2 million for research on pancreatic cancer.

Pancreatic cancer is the fourth leading cause of all cancer deaths in Canada. There is no known cause, no early detection, and no known cure. That is why it is so important that we raise awareness of this deadly disease.

I ask all members of Parliament to join me in recognizing the work of the National Pancreatic Cancer Canada Foundation as it strives to improve pancreatic cancer survival and create hope through awareness, education, patient support, and research.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very fortunate to be in P.E.I. earlier this year with Mike Redmond, leader of the P.E.I. NDP. We heard about the many challenges people face in accessing rural health care because of government decisions and because provincial resources are stretched to the max.

In particular, I want to support the rural community of Souris that I visited. Residents there displayed extraordinary unity to maintain their long-standing local access to services.

The Conservative government's cuts to the health care transfers are compromising health care in rural communities and putting thousands of Islanders' health at risk.

Also, this week we celebrate Family Doctor Week in Canada. Each and every day in this country, family doctors diagnose and treat illness and injury, promote disease prevention and good health, coordinate care, and advocate on behalf of their patients.

I want to thank family physicians for the invaluable contribution they provide to Canadians' health and wish the College of Family Physicians a productive Family Medicine Forum in Vancouver this week.

* * *

CHRISTA LUKENDA MICHAUD

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honour of the life of Christa Lukenda Michaud, from my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, who was tragically killed in August, and to read the words penned by her loving husband, Ryan, as follows:

While innocently riding her bicycle, Christa was fatally struck down by a drunk driver, ending her life of 28 years.

Christa will be remembered as a special teacher who would always be there if you needed her, my loving and precious wife, and the youngest in a family of 10 who kept everyone young and playful at heart.

It is senseless that we Canadians must continue to accept these losses of life because this shameful act is tolerated. In honour of all deceased from impaired driving, we must make it our individual duty to raise awareness in our own communities in order to prevent these tragedies that rip families apart.

Christa, you will be missed forever and remembered always by those who love you. Ryan.

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**CANADIAN ELECTRICITY ASSOCIATION LIFESAVING
AWARD**

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Horace Crocker and Neville Gosse from Channel-Port aux Basques in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's, and both are in the gallery.

Recently Horace and Neville, both employees with Newfoundland Power Incorporated, stopped at the scene of a serious road collision they came upon while at work.

The driver of a dirt bike had collided with a truck, leaving the driver of the bike in critical condition.

Horace and Neville recognized the seriousness of the situation when they saw the injured man bleeding profusely. They turned him over and ensured his airway was not blocked while making sure his broken leg remained stationary.

They did this while securing the area and protecting the injured man from oncoming traffic until the RCMP and ambulance arrived.

This evening, I will have the honour to participate in presenting the Canadian Electricity Association's Lifesaving Award to Horace and Neville.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating both men on their valiant actions, which resulted in a life being saved.

● (1405)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair would remind all hon. members that it is inappropriate to identify who is or is not in the chamber, whether it is down below or up in the gallery.

The hon. member for Durham.

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VIMY FOUNDATION FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week the Vimy Foundation launched its Give a Vimy for Vimy campaign, inviting Canadians to donate \$20 toward the construction of a new education centre at the Vimy monument in France.

Canada's new \$20 bill features the Vimy Ridge monument, so Canadians can donate a Vimy toward the lasting legacy of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Statements by Members

Our government has pledged \$5 million toward this important initiative, which is to be built in time for the Vimy centennial in 2017. We also encourage Canadians to learn more about the important role Vimy played in our development as a nation and the contributions of their communities.

In my riding, Uxbridge native Colonel Sam Sharpe led the 116th Battalion at Vimy Ridge, and he holds the unique distinction of serving on the front lines in Europe while also serving as the Conservative member of Parliament for Ontario North.

I urge Canadians to give a Vimy to Vimy to ensure that the legacy of Vimy Ridge and its role in our history is preserved for generations to come.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LAURENTIAN CULTURAL COUNCIL

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Conseil de la culture des Laurentides will host the 24th annual Grands prix de la culture des Laurentides.

It gives me great pleasure to say that, with its cultural awards, its cultural heritage fund and its training programs, the Conseil de la culture des Laurentides has become the main cultural hub in my riding and the entire region.

In this new Quebec of many colours and accents, in this blended and interconnected society, our culture is reinventing and redefining itself every day. Movements, changes, experiences, sudden surges and commitments; our personal and collective identity is fluid, not static. It becomes richer because of new influences and trends.

With their art, artists tell us: wait, you think you know everything? You haven't seen anything yet.

Congratulations to the Conseil de la culture des Laurentides, its employees, its board of directors and its volunteers. Congratulations to all of you who support with dignity those who are passionately devoted to art and freedom.

* * *

[*English*]

WORLD JUNIOR A HOCKEY CHALLENGE

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the World Junior A Hockey Challenge is under way in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, which is in the great riding of West Nova. The event takes place from November 4 to November 10.

Yarmouth has the unique distinction of being the first town to host this tournament more than once. It is a great honour for everyone involved.

The tournament attracts thousands of visitors and will showcase some of the world's top young players from the United States, Russia, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, and, of course, Canada.

Though the finals will be in Yarmouth, games will take place in communities throughout southwestern Nova Scotia. It is a great opportunity for the area.

I congratulate the volunteers, surrounding communities, and the town of Yarmouth, which has won the right to host this event once again.

I wish the best of luck to our athletes, and again, congratulations to everyone involved.

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CANADIAN ELECTRICITY ASSOCIATION LIFESAVING AWARD

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to talk about one of my constituents, who saved the life of a young boy.

Kirby Shafer, operations superintendent with the electrical department of the City of Medicine Hat, ran over to a young boy who had been playing with friends at an ice rink. The boy was clearly unable to breathe due to the fact that he had swallowed a large candy. When Kirby asked if the boy was choking, he gestured yes. Kirby did not even think twice. He immediately began to administer the steps of the Heimlich manoeuvre to the boy.

Thanks to his first aid training from the City of Medicine Hat, Kirby's actions meant that the boy made a full recovery in hospital.

I salute his bravery and his tenacity with this outstanding act. Kirby will be awarded with the Lifesaving Award from the Canadian Electricity Association, which is awarded to utility employees whose actions directly result in saving lives.

Congratulates to Kirby. He has done us all very proud.

* * *

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

NAVIGATION RESTRICTIONS

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives say they are champions of cutting red tape.

On Friday, I will be moving Motion No. 441 in order to simplify the Vessel Operation Restriction Regulations. The purpose of my motion is to simplify the process to obtain navigation restrictions, the 20-some pages of procedures, the years of efforts, and the hundreds of thousands of dollars it is costing municipalities. This is a prime opportunity for the government, which claims to hate red tape.

I hope all my colleagues will support this motion.

* * *

[*English*]

HOMELESS VETERANS

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Veterans Affairs met with individuals who are dedicated to helping homeless veterans get off the streets. We, like many veterans groups such as the Royal Canadian Legion, believe that veterans' homelessness should never happen in the first place. We must stand together to address these unfortunate circumstances.

Statements by Members

I call on every member in the House and all Canadians to please contact the Minister of Veterans Affairs immediately if they know of or come across a homeless veteran in their community.

* * *

PANCREATIC CANCER

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of the House that November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month. I want all of us to applaud the important, ongoing work done by the national Pancreatic Cancer Canada foundation in raising public awareness and supporting vital research efforts to end the scourge of Canada's most lethal of cancers.

Pancreatic cancer claims 4,300 Canadian lives every year. Sadly, its mortality rate is three out of four, with a five-year survival rate of only 6%. In spite of these tragic statistics, pancreatic cancer research receives less than 1% of all cancer research dollars. One of the truly devastating aspects of this disease is that less than 15% of patients are diagnosed early enough to save lives.

I lost my older brother to this dreadful disease. Even today, my family is haunted by the thought that early detection might have saved his life.

I urge all members to support the good work of the foundation by raising awareness in their ridings. We can support fundraising activities by marshalling our friends and family members. We can become advocates for more significant and sustained governmental investment in research.

The final message that I want to leave with the House today is this: early detection can save lives.

* * *

OECD STUDY ON WELL-BEING

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a report released today by the OECD shows that Canada is world leader when it comes to the well-being of its citizens. The report says:

Canada performs exceptionally well in measures of well-being, as shown by the fact that it ranks among the top countries in a large number of topics in the Better Life Index.

Canada scored near the top for education, health, housing, skills, social connections, and life satisfaction, in addition to low long-term unemployment rates and our low crime rate.

Our Conservative government's low-tax plan for jobs and growth is helping to reduce poverty and increase the long-term prosperity of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. The facts speak for themselves. There are now fewer Canadians living below the low income cut-off than ever before in the history of our country.

Our Conservative government will continue to focus on what matters to Canadians: jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity.

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CO-OPERATIVES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today representatives of Canada's credit unions are visiting

parliamentarians to enhance our level of awareness of the important role they play throughout Canada in over 1,700 different locations. Indeed, in over 1,000 of our smaller communities, there would not be a financial institution were it not for their credit union. These are community-minded, well-run, resilient businesses, focused on servicing their members, who number over five million people.

Last year, during the International Year of Cooperatives, the House unanimously supported my motion to create a special committee mandated to take a look at the challenges facing Canada's co-ops, including credit unions. As I have said before, this committee did good work, and the government responded positively to its report.

Tomorrow the industry committee will be asked to create a subcommittee to focus on co-ops, their needs and challenges. Co-ops throughout Canada, including credit unions, again look forward to the constructive work of parliamentarians.

* * *

● (1415)

CONTRABAND TOBACCO

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is committed to keeping contraband tobacco off our streets. Today we reintroduced legislation aimed at reducing contraband tobacco.

Cheap, illegal tobacco can make it easier for children and teens to get cigarettes into their hands and start smoking, which obviously has a negative impact on their health. My own father started smoking at the age of 11 and died of lung cancer later.

There is no place for contraband tobacco in our communities. The legislation is an important step in the fight against illegal tobacco and the impact it has on all Canadians, and young Canadians in particular.

I would hope that these common sense measures have the support of the members opposite.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given the mess they are in, the Conservatives could have hung their heads in shame on the weekend. Instead, they acted like the people on the *Titanic* who celebrated as it was sinking.

They spent a weekend in Calgary with their heads in the sand, working harder on their regressive measures, such as measures to limit women's right to choose freely, and regressive taxes. They still have their reform policies—yes, indeed—but they have adopted Liberal reflexes to get out of their scandal. Where was the Senate in all this? Not a single word about it.

The Prime Minister is so desperate that he tried to put the blame on us, the Supreme Court, old Mother Hubbard, basically everyone except for the people truly responsible: his employees, the people working in his office, the people advising him, the people who signed cheques, the people who orchestrated a cover-up, the people he himself chose.

Canadians deserve better. They deserve the truth, and the NDP will do everything to get it.

* * *

[English]

WHITE POPPY CAMPAIGN

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I call upon my colleagues in the Liberal Party and in the NDP to join with me in denouncing the ideological extremists who, this Remembrance Day, are defacing the poppy, and in doing so, disrespecting the courage, sacrifice, and honour that generations of Canadian veterans have made for our freedom and for theirs.

The so-called white poppy campaign is an outrage. It dishonours our veterans.

I ask all parliamentarians to support my call to lay politics aside this Remembrance Day, leave the poppy in its glorious red, stand to remember the sacrifices of our veterans, and to not play crass political games this week and on November 11.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are disappointed in the Prime Minister.

He missed a golden opportunity this weekend to come clean about his role in the Senate expense scandal. No contrition; no apology.

Why will the Prime Minister not own up to his responsibility instead of telling Canadians that he could not care less?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is, of course, an honour to serve in any chamber of the Parliament of Canada. When people are elected or named to the Senate, they should treat it as a great honour.

Obviously when we name people, we name people of high standing in Canadian society. We expect them to be able to follow the rules and conduct themselves in a way that shows integrity.

When that is not done, we take our responsibilities. I obviously urge the Senate to take its responsibilities and apply proper sanction to senators who have not respected the rules.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about following rules and let us talk about assuming responsibilities.

The Prime Minister's own office is under criminal investigation by the RCMP. Now the Prime Minister wants others held responsible, as he just said, but this is his staff and these are his senators.

Oral Questions

How long will Canadians have to wait before the Prime Minister accepts his own responsibility? Why is he the only one who is never accountable?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course that statement is not true.

As we know, certain individuals and some senators are under investigation. When we learned that they had not conducted themselves in a proper manner, they left the Conservative caucus. They remain under investigation.

I think the facts are absolutely clear. They have not acted in a way that respects taxpayers' dollars and have done so on a very large scale. The consequence for that in our judgment should be that they be removed from the public payroll. We urge the Senate to do that immediately.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister confirm that the RCMP has requested documents from his office?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, I think that the NDP leader is talking about a letter that the RCMP wrote, I presume, to Mr. Duffy's lawyer.

[English]

I think what the Leader of the Opposition is referring to is a letter the RCMP has written, I gather, to the lawyer for Mr. Duffy, urging him to co-operate with the RCMP investigation. Of course, we would all urge that.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Okay then, Mr. Speaker, let us talk about his co-operation with the RCMP.

Can he be perfectly clear, yes or no? Will he turn over all of the documents to the RCMP, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said since the beginning, we are helping the RCMP by turning over all of the documents.

[English]

We have been very clear from the beginning. This office will give the RCMP any and all assistance it requires. It is important that those who committed the acts in question be held accountable and that they be held accountable in the Senate. Of course if there is anything beyond that that investigators think they should be charged with, they will get full assistance from our office in doing so, because we demand that kind of accountability.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that works out well because Canadians also demand that kind of accountability.

One simple question, and can the Prime Minister be crystal clear, will he table all of those documents in the House of Commons so that all Canadians can see them? Yes or no.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the responsibility of this government is to make sure all accountability is followed. We are obviously making sure authorities are assisted with their look into the various individuals, as is their responsibility.

Let me be clear once again, because the leader of the NDP keeps trying to insinuate some role on my part. I have been very clear. I did not know about any payment from Mr. Wright to Mr. Duffy, or about the story to deceive Canadians about that. I do not approve that. Had my authorization been sought, it would not have been granted.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the “latest version of events”, Irving Gerstein, the head of the Conservative fund, admitted over the weekend to being aware of the plan to repay Mike Duffy's expenses.

Between February and May, did the Prime Minister's chief fundraiser ever tell the Prime Minister about his chief of staff's scheme to pay Mike Duffy's expenses?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker. As I have said repeatedly, I did not know anything about that until May 15. That is, of course, the reason Mr. Wright is no longer on the public payroll and also why we believe that Mr. Duffy should also no longer be on the public payroll.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister's chief fundraiser knew about the scheme and kept it a secret, why is he still the Prime Minister's chief fundraiser? If Nigel Wright deceived the Prime Minister, so did Senator Gerstein. Why is he still on the public payroll? Why is he still a senator?

Everyone's story keeps changing, including the Prime Minister's. Canadians deserve straight answers. Will the Prime Minister set an example for everyone involved and testify under oath?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the actions in question here are the actions of Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy. Mr. Wright is no longer on the public payroll as a consequence of his actions, and Mr. Duffy should no longer be on the public payroll.

While we are talking about changing stories, it is interesting to hear the Liberal Party demanding some kind of sanction when, in fact, for the past two weeks Liberals have been doing everything in their power to protect the club over there in the Senate and make sure nobody is ever held accountable for anything. It is time that the Liberal senators supported some serious sanctions for senators who have violated public trust.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, another fact in this sordid saga emerged. Senator Gerstein admitted that he was aware of the arrangement between Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy. The Prime Minister fired Nigel Wright because of his cheque and his silence. He admitted that Senator Gerstein did not tell him anything either, yet Senator Gerstein still has his job. This double standard is deeply worrisome.

Will the Prime Minister testify under oath?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the actions and responsibility of Mr.

Wright and Mr. Duffy. Mr. Wright is no longer on the public payroll, and Mr. Duffy should not be either.

Talk about hypocrisy. Over the past two weeks, the Liberal Party has done everything in its power to protect senators who broke the rules. It is time the Liberals stepped up to support harsh sanctions against senators who betrayed the public trust.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we remind the Prime Minister that 59 members of that club were named by him. Of course, he is the same person who once swore up and down that he would never name an unelected senator. He has broken Brian Mulroney's record.

When the Prime Minister met with Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy about repaying the illegal expenses, did he say “Nigel would make the arrangements”, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker. It is interesting to hear this from the leader of the NDP. The senators, the vast majority of them, support taking strong action in this measure, as they should.

Of course, I would just point out for the record that I only appointed senators after the NDP and the others tried to fill the vacancies themselves in the Senate.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): There he goes again, Mr. Speaker. He has a slight tendency to forget that people can actually fact check after question period.

Just to be clear, the Prime Minister, therefore, does admit that Nigel Wright was, indeed, present when he met with Mike Duffy, just the three of them.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already been clear about the facts around that.

I indicated to Mr. Duffy and I indicated to all members of our caucus that I thought it was not right for him to claim expenses that he had not incurred. That view was communicated directly and personally to Mr. Duffy.

Afterwards, obviously, my wishes on that were not carried out. The public was deceived on that. For that reason, Mr. Wright is no longer on the payroll and Mr. Duffy should not be either.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now the Prime Minister is asking Canadians to believe that Nigel Wright was present but that he gave him no instructions. That is just not credible.

Was the original plan from the PMO to have the Conservative Party pay off Mike Duffy's expenses when the bill was just \$32,000, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, my view from the beginning, conveyed to Mr. Duffy, was that he had no right to claim expenses from the Senate that he had not actually incurred out of his pocket. I expected that Mr. Duffy would be the one to repay those expenses. That is what I was told had been done. That is what the Canadian people were told was done. That was not true. For that reason, Mr. Wright is no longer on the payroll of my office, no longer on the public payroll, and Mr. Duffy should not be so either.

Oral Questions

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remind the Prime Minister that these actions took place in what is known as the “Prime Minister’s Office”—so, he wants to be in charge; he just does not want to be responsible.

I would remind him that Senator Gerstein was handing out the money of the Conservative Party.

Last time I checked, for the time being, he is still the leader of the Conservative Party. He is responsible. Why will he not own up to that?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, as we have said before, political parties do quite frequently provide legal assistance to members of their caucus in good standing, as in fact has been the case for the Leader of the Opposition.

My instructions and my views on the matter of Mr. Duffy’s inappropriate expenses were clear: that he should repay those expenses. That is what I was told had been done. That is what the Canadian public was told was done. When that turned out not to be the truth, I took my responsibility and made the appropriate changes in my office.

The government urges the Senate to do the same thing and take Mr. Duffy and others off the public payroll.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, right, so let me get this straight.

Gerstein knew about the scam, but he gets to stay in the Conservative caucus. Nigel Wright told the police that Senator Gerstein signed off on the original plan.

The question for us now in that case is: Is the Prime Minister today saying that Nigel Wright lied to the RCMP?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight.

The Leader of the Opposition apparently has some difficulty with some legal assistance being provided to members of the Conservative caucus, but he apparently has no difficulty at all in getting literally six figures worth of legal assistance from his party, even having his party pay court-awarded damages against him in a court case he lost. That is something for him to explain.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that this is a concept he has a hard time with. Nevertheless, we are talking about the Prime Minister’s Office, in other words, him and his accountability.

Was the Prime Minister aware of the initial plan hatched by his chief of staff and his chief fundraiser to reimburse Senator Duffy’s expenses with Conservative Party money? Was he aware of Senator Gerstein’s plan, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my position has been clear from the beginning. I told Mr. Duffy that I expected him to reimburse his inappropriate expenses. I was told that that was what happened.

As it turns out, that is not really what happened. That is why Mr. Wright is no longer on the public payroll. Mr. Duffy should not be either.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, was PMO communications officer Stephen Lecce involved in coming up with the cover-up story for Mike Duffy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Leader of the Opposition is now just throwing out names and making allegations against individuals without even the slightest piece of evidence. He has no inclination that is true at all.

We know whose actions are in question here. Mr. Wright has accepted responsibility for his actions. He has accepted the penalties for that and is under investigation.

Mr. Duffy and the senators who, quite frankly, abused the public trust by taking money when they should not have taken it are the ones who should be dealt with most severely, and that is what we expect the Senate to do.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about his.

Nigel Wright says that Irving Gerstein knew about the \$90,000. The Prime Minister has acknowledged that others knew as well. If this story is true, and since these people all knew, since they allowed him to make false statements in Parliament and since all of these people participated in what the Prime Minister calls a deception against him, then why have none of these people been fired?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, Mr. Wright has acknowledged that these were his actions, that he took them himself using his own resources, and he executed them. He is held responsible for those actions, as he should be, and as should obviously the senators who took the money from the taxpayers in the first place.

Mr. Duffy, who is apparently still not out any money for having actually taken money that he never actually spent in the first place, still has all that money, which is why the Senate should take the actions that are appropriate.

• (1435)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are lots of “actually”s, but no answers.

When the news of the \$90,000 pay-off to Mike Duffy first broke, the Prime Minister said that Nigel Wright gave Mike Duffy, according to the Prime Minister, a “personal cheque”. After that first day, the Prime Minister never repeated that particular phrase again. He said instead that Nigel Wright used his own “resources”, so it was his own resources afterwards, and at the beginning it was a personal cheque. Who told the Prime Minister to stop saying “personal cheque”? Why did that part of the story change? Why was it important?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, if the Leader of the Opposition is trying to assert that in any way the money of the Prime Minister's Office or the money of the government was used to pay Mr. Duffy, that is completely incorrect. It was Mr. Wright himself using his own resources who paid Mr. Duffy, and then obviously Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy allowed the Canadian public to be misled on what had actually occurred.

As I have said repeatedly, Mr. Wright has acknowledged that and accepted responsibility. He is no longer on the public payroll. One would think that the individual who still has the \$90,000 in his pocket inappropriately would be removed from the public payroll, and it is about time the Senate did so.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Senator Gerstein obviously had discussions about the cover-up with Nigel Wright. Wright says so, the police say so and Senator Gerstein has confirmed it.

He has also confirmed that he authorized payment of Duffy's legal costs on the request of the PMO. What was that money actually for? Duffy's legal costs were inextricably connected to the cover-up. If Senator Gerstein thought he was paying for something else, something legitimate, are Duffy's lawyers being sued for false pretences to get the money back, and will the government table the itemized invoice detailing the \$13,560?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said repeatedly in the House, of course our party, like all parties, does provide legal assistance to its members when they are in good standing with our party. At the same time, we are learning that the Liberal leader is actually now apparently telling his senators that they should abstain from making a decision on this in the Senate. As we have been saying for weeks, the Liberals will fight really hard for the status quo, but when it comes to fighting for taxpayers, they abstain.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for three months, from February to May, the Prime Minister claims he never noticed how his orders about Mike Duffy's expenses were being implemented; nor was he ever briefed; nor did he ever ask a question. He says he saw Duffy on television talking about a mortgage to repay the \$90,000, but that story was a lie. Duffy says he was told to lie by the Prime Minister's Office. Did anyone in the PMO counsel Mike Duffy to lie? Has the Prime Minister asked the question?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there they go again, standing up for Mike Duffy, standing up for these three disgraced senators and disgraced former Liberal senator, Mac Harb. Now we know why it is they are fighting so hard for the status quo, that they are even going the distance. They are going the distance on this one, listening to the Liberal leader who is trying to force his Senate colleagues to abstain, not to make a decision nor stand up for taxpayers.

We have been very clear that these senators should be removed. They accepted money they did not earn. They should be removed, without pay, from the Senate. We hope the Senate will deal with it immediately.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP investigators are looking for the PMO email chain outlining the lie about Duffy's mortgage. It would shatter the government's integrity. That search for evidence also raises serious issues about all the other documents related to the cover-up. In access to information requests, Order Paper questions and other inquiries, the government has said, incredibly but repeatedly, that there is no paper trail.

Can the Prime Minister categorically assure Canadians that since February 13 no evidence has been removed from the government premises and nothing has been destroyed?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have said, and we will continue to say, that we will continue to work with authorities as they investigate this.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the environment commissioner must be pretty tired of repeating himself, because in yet another scathing report he found "a wide and persistent gap between what the government commits to do and what it is achieving". In other words, the Conservatives are all talk and no action.

The Conservatives have allowed the backlog for species at risk strategies to grow beyond a decade. More inaction means that more species will disappear. Does the minister understand that neglect and mismanagement is not an ecosystem recovery strategy?

• (1440)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting and preserving our rich biodiversity. That is why we announced our government's intent to introduce an emergency protection order for the sage grouse. Thanks to our action, more than 60% of the recovery documents have been posted in the last three years. Our record speaks for itself.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course the minister agrees with the recommendations, but if the recommendations are not applied, what is the point?

Ecosystems and endangered species are not adequately protected. The Conservatives have reduced our scientific capacity, which is preventing us from doing the proper planning, oversight and management. In addition, this is supposed to be one of their priorities. We can only imagine what happens with issues that are not a priority for them.

What does the minister actually intend to do to straighten out this mess?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting and preserving our rich biodiversity, which is why budget 2012 increased funding for species at risk. That is why our government announced that it will be unveiling a new national conservation plan. That is why we have announced our government's intent to introduce an emergency protection order for the sage grouse.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the provinces have once again pointed out the urgent need to reform the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan.

Last week, they agreed on four principles to update those plans and guarantee secure retirement income for all Quebecers and Canadians.

Does the Minister of Finance support those four principles? If not, which ones is he opposed to?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada pension plan reform continues to be examined by our government, in conjunction with our provincial counterparts. We share the concerns of employees. We share some of the concerns of employers. We also share the concerns of some of the provinces when they say that this is not the time to add extra burden. We are still in a time of fragile fiscal recovery.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want the Canada pension plan improved. They do not want more studies. The provinces agree. Seniors agree. Experts agree. Why are the Conservatives standing in the way of progress?

With Canada's population rapidly aging, ensuring a secure retirement is a major policy challenge. Provinces and experts agree with the NDP: strengthening CPP is the prudent thing to do, and reform now will avoid painful consequences down the road.

Canadians are rightly worried about their retirement. What is the minister waiting for? Why will the government not act?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we do continue to look at Canada pension plan reform.

I can assure the House, the NDP's plan to double Canada pension premiums, while the economy is still fragile, is not a moderate proposal.

Despite the NDP's risky schemes, we continue to stand up for retirement and for seniors during the global recovery.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, big union bosses at the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers are telling anyone who will listen that they want to ensure that convicted rapists and murderers have their own private accommodations while in prison. They say that it is troubling that these prisoners are forced to share cells. My constituents strongly disagree.

Plenty of Canadians are required to share accommodations for a variety of reasons. Could the Minister of Public Safety please tell the House whether he agrees that these dangerous criminals should be treated better than college students?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul for his question.

He is right. In Donnacona, Millhaven, and Collins Bay, I have been able to see the work our correctional officers do.

[English]

Let me also state that double-bunking is a completely normal practice used in many western countries, and studies, including a Canadian one, show that it has no impact upon the rate of violence in prison.

Our Conservative government strongly disagrees with the NDP. We strongly believe that double-bunking is totally appropriate for convicted criminals.

* * *

● (1445)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a new report from the military ombudsman points to a heartbreaking situation facing too many military families. With soldiers on deployment, spouses and children face challenges at twice the rate of other Canadians. Military families are four times less likely to have a family physician. They need better access to housing, employment, and decent education.

We are asking these women and men to serve our country, but not enough is done for their families at home.

Could the Minister of National Defence tell Canadians why military families are not given the priority they deserve?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I should point out for the hon. member that the Canadian Armed Forces is working to ease the burden of housing on military families. I can quote from the ombudsman himself, who says, "support to families has been elevated to a top institutional priority" and "Today's military families receive more support than ever."

I hope the hon. member will get on board and start supporting the government's effort to support the men and women in uniform.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite their rhetoric, the reality is that the Conservatives are ignoring soldiers' families. They are doing nothing to improve the inadequate housing situation for our soldiers, who often have to live in poorly renovated houses built more than half a century ago. The ombudsman's report points out that our military families are finding it harder and harder to find affordable, quality housing near military bases.

What does the minister intend to do to correct this situation?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why she is referring to the ombudsman's report as rhetoric.

Again, I would point out that the ombudsman said, "support to families has been elevated to a top institutional priority" and "Today's military families receive more support than ever".

If she really wants to do something, she should start talking to her colleagues and quit voting against the billions of dollars that this government has expended to support the men and women in uniform and veterans in our country.

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*[Translation]***VETERANS**

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, such fine speeches, but the reality is that the Conservatives continue to balance their budget on the backs of heroes who risked their lives for our country, which is what they did with the veterans' funeral and burial program.

I asked the minister yesterday why less than 30% of the budget for the funeral assistance program had been disbursed. He said that he had doubled the limits of the program.

What is the point of doubling the limits of a program when veterans and their families are not even eligible for it?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, listening to that rhetoric, it is almost wishful thinking that we have more of our veterans deceased so there would be more money used.

The reality is that the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed, in his report, that our government more than doubled the finances for funerals and other programs, while all the time the NDP has voted against these programs.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what utter nonsense. He knows very well that the money was only given to those who qualified. Two-thirds of all applicants for the Last Post Fund are still denied. That is what the PBO said. We said that a year ago, that if we did not raise the exemption limit past the \$12,000 mark, two-thirds of all applicants would still be denied.

This is the last chance that a grateful nation has to say to a family of a veteran who is now deceased, "Thank you for your sacrifice and service".

Will the government now increase the exemption limit so more veterans and their families will have access to these funds?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government has done more for our serving men and women and our veterans.

It is ironic the one thing that member has shown is that he consistently votes against the equipment our men and women need in theatre, and when they come home, that members votes against their benefits as veterans.

I call upon that member to stop playing political games at the expense of our serving armed forces members and our veterans.

[Translation]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more and more Canadian soldiers who served in Afghanistan are showing signs of psychological trauma. Many of them have to wait months before they can see a specialist and get the medical support they need.

Why has the government inflated the administrative budget in Ottawa instead of supporting the members of the operational forces?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has worked to ensure that the men and women who serve our country benefit from the best available health care. This is why we have doubled our investment in mental health services and doubled the number of health care workers in the Canadian Armed Forces. This is only appropriate. We want to ensure they get the help they need.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has thumped its chest more while doing less.

Last week I met with the Legion command and veterans in western Canada and heard about government delays in processing routine benefits for departing members of the forces. Without these benefits, some cannot even feed their families or pay their rent. Therefore, the Legion is having to use its poppy fund donations to fill the gap. That is shameful.

Why has the government ballooned the budget for civilians at DND headquarters in Ottawa, while abandoning its responsibilities to departing members of the forces?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2013 doubled the financial support for the families of veterans, while cutting more red tape in the process. These changes represent valuable assistance that is available to the families of veterans during difficult times.

What we have done is responsive to the needs of our veterans and their families, and we continue to work on that issue. The Liberal members should join us because they consistently vote against our programs.

* * *

[Translation]

POVERTY

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Food Banks Canada HungerCount 2013 report was released today. It shows that food bank use remains at record levels. In fact, over 1.7 million Canadians will use a food bank this year. It should be noted that half of those people will do so for the first time.

Why have the Conservatives not yet introduced measures to reduce food bank use, such as guaranteed long-term funding for affordable housing, for example?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member failed to mention another study that was released today, namely the OECD study, which shows that Canada is one of the best countries in the world when it comes to quality of life.

The number of Canadians living below the low income cut-off is now at its lowest level. In 2012, the working income tax benefit alone pulled over 100,000 people and 57,000 families up from under the low income cut-off. Since July 2009, over a million net new jobs have been created. Furthermore, nearly 90% of those jobs are in very high-paying sectors.

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us tell that to the people in the waiting lines at the food banks.

The Conservatives have failed to create quality jobs, and Canadian families are paying the price for their mismanagement of the economy. Over the past three decades, 80% of families have seen their actual income drop. Under the Conservatives, unemployment has increased by over 270,000. No parent should have to choose between paying rent and buying food.

What will the minister do to address the growing problem of food insecurity facing so many families?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely ridiculous. The member forgot to mention that today the OECD published a real report based on real objective data which indicated that Canada had one of the best qualities of living in the world.

I am pleased to say that the level of Canadians living below the low income cut-off line is at its lowest level in our economic history. This government has reduced the number of people living below the poverty line by hundreds of thousands.

If the member wants to talk about food banks, I remember how busy they were during the NDP government in Ontario.

Oral Questions

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a report released by the OECD again shows that the rhetoric used by the NDP and the Liberals does not match the facts. The report shows that our Conservative government's economic plan is working and helping Canadians obtain good-quality, well-paying jobs. The facts are clear. Poverty and crime are declining, and the quality of life for Canadians is improving.

Would the Minister of Employment and Social Development update the House on how our government's plan for the economy is working?

• (1455)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was just mentioning, in fact, the OECD report today outlined that Canada has one of the highest-quality standards of living in the developed world. That has improved under this government since the global downturn, with the creation of 1.1 million net new jobs, 90% of them full time and overwhelmingly in the private sector.

We have the lowest number of Canadians living below the low income cut-off line in our economic history. We have the highest number of Canadians employed in our economic history. We should be proud of the remarkable leadership on the world stage represented by the prosperity under this government's management.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs is closing nine VAC service offices. The minister is leaving 26,778 veterans out in the cold. This is just another example that the Minister of Veterans Affairs could not care less.

My question to the minister is, when is he going to get up and vote that they stay open? When is he going to do the right thing, which is look after our veterans?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member has his facts all wrong, as usual. There is, however, one thing in common that he and I have. We are both concerned and conscientious, hopefully, about veterans. Obviously, he and I both disagree on how that is done.

Nonetheless, we do agree on the fact that both he and I feel that his leader is not fit to be the Prime Minister of this country.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a ruling by the Dominican Republic Constitutional Tribunal strips many people born in that country, including many people of Haitian descent, of their Dominican citizenship. This ruling violates international law and has sparked an outcry around the world. However, the Canadian government has remained strangely silent.

Haitians in Montreal have created an advocacy group to draw attention to this matter. Will the government support them?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we are following this issue tremendously closely. I am very committed to working with my colleague and friend opposite on what we might do to provide that support and assistance to these individuals.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is properly focused on the priorities of Canadians: creating new jobs and new opportunities. That is why we continue to open new markets for Canadian exporters around the world.

Just this morning, as a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade, I was honoured to witness the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement signing. With this agreement, Canadian exporters, service providers, and investors will benefit from enhanced market access, which will create new sources of prosperity for businesses in London, Canadian businesses of all sizes, and all their workers.

Can the Minister of International Trade please update the House on this very important agreement?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for London West for his good work on the trade committee. Canada's commercial relationship with Honduras is growing, and this trade agreement will ensure that this relationship continues to grow.

We continue to expand Canada's trade opportunities in large and small countries around the world. Sadly, the NDP trade critic is quoted by *The Huffington Post* as saying that Honduras is not a key economy and has no value for Canada. It is shocking. He should say that to the Hondurans.

The NDP clearly has no credibility on trade.

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TAXATION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today representatives of nearly 40 credit unions from across Canada are meeting on the Hill.

Credit unions are solid, dependable, and innovative. They are important to our economy. In 350 rural communities, the credit union is the only financial institution in town, but rural branches are

at risk. In their budget, the Conservatives raised taxes on credit unions.

Will the government reverse its short-sighted decision to raise taxes?

• (1500)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, credit unions still have access to the lower small-business tax rate. That has not changed. We have simply eliminated an outdated tax subsidy from the 1970s, when the tax system was very different. No other small business received that special tax subsidy. In fact, Quebec eliminated a comparable subsidy in 2003.

Our government continues to be a strong supporter of the credit union system in Canada.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, Treasury Board documents tabled last week show that the finance department has spent an additional \$15.25 million shilling for the economic action plan, bringing the total to \$113 million since the economic action plan's inception.

Now the government defends this largesse by explaining that the ads are necessary to inform Canadians about some program or issue, yet its own survey indicates that they have not been successful in either directing traffic to the website or to calling the advertised toll-free phone number.

In this time of fiscal restraint, when will the government stop wasting taxpayers' money on this self-serving drive?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to have some new friends on the NDP benches, I notice.

I would remind the hon. member that it is the responsibility, it is a duty, of the government to communicate on important programs and services and how they are available to Canadians. Obviously, advertising is a key component of how we can do that. We treat all taxpayer money with the utmost respect. We require government business to be done at the lowest possible cost.

I am surprised the hon. member did not key in on another important fact that was found in those documents as well: the budget deficit is \$6.9 billion lower than projected. Well done, Minister of Finance.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency José Adonis Lavaire, Minister of Industry and Commerce of the Republic of Honduras.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I find it very distasteful for the minister to answer a very important question by turning words that I never—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Hold on. Hold on. Let me repeat this. He put words in my mouth that I do not think my leader is going to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We have had points of order raised in the past about things said in preambles to questions or in responses. The member knows that it is not a matter of a point of order but is more a matter of debate. If he takes issue with what the minister said, he can maybe try to address it in a future question period. I do not see what the point of order is if he is having a dispute over what may or may not have been said.

I will ask the member to take his seat now, because I do not hear what the point of order actually was.

 ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled: one, Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Honduras, done in Ottawa on November 5, 2013; two, Agreement on Environmental Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras, done at Ottawa on November 5, 2013; and three, Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras, done at Ottawa on November 5, 2013. An explanatory memorandum is included with each treaty.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt is rising on a point of order. As I said, I did not hear anything earlier that he raised that gave me an indication that it was a point of order, so if he could quickly explain to the Chair what he feels the point of order is he is raising, I will give him the floor again, but I hope that he is not engaging in further debate.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I just wish that the minister would rise and withdraw what he said, absolutely. They were not my words—

Business of Supply

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—INSTRUCTION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlottetown has five minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue to speak to the motion currently before the House, a motion that, if passed, would seek to have the Prime Minister of Canada testify under oath about what he knew about the \$90,000 payment.

I have a couple of points in relation to the motion. First of all, this is not about Senate reform. This is about a scandal that has gone into the Prime Minister's Office and has implicated those closest to him, those who report directly to him. It is not a motion about Senate reform.

Second, the motion does not preclude a wider examination by the committee. It is the House that has the power to order the Prime Minister to appear before the committee. That is what the motion seeks to do. There is nothing to preclude the committee from engaging in a wider examination, and from inviting and then ordering other witnesses to appear. Indeed, it would appear that is what is in the interests of Canadians.

It could very well be that one of the versions that we heard in the House from the Prime Minister is indeed accurate, but that still leaves the question of the culture within the Prime Minister's Office, apparently a place where it is okay to give the boss plausible deniability while paying off a sitting parliamentarian to obstruct a forensic audit, while paying, from the Conservative Party, the legal fees directly associated with that.

I can say, as someone who practised law for 17 years, it is quite common for cheques to pass between lawyers. However, it is also quite common that when a cheque passes, it is impressed with a trust and that trust could be in the form of a formal trust agreement, but it could simply be done through an exchange of letters.

I believe that the inquiry that we seek before the committee would allow us to get behind any trust conditions that were impressed upon that \$90,000 cheque. It bears remembering that we still have not seen the cheque. It bears remembering that we know that one legal bill involved in this transaction was \$13,000. Legal fees in the city of Ottawa could be up to \$500 an hour. If we assume that this is a top-shelf lawyer billing the top rate, there were at least 26 hours put into negotiating this. I find it hard to imagine that a trust cheque went from one lawyer's office to another without some sort of an agreement if not only an exchange of letters, which is very common in the legal profession. It says, "This cheque is impressed with the following trust conditions and it will not be released until these conditions are met".

Business of Supply

The Canadian public deserves to know the terms of those trust conditions. I have little doubt that they exist. It appears that the documentation, according to the access to information request that has been filed and the Order Paper questions that have been filed, does not exist within the office of the Prime Minister. However, miraculously, Senator Duffy was able to produce a binder full of documents.

These questions are on the minds of Canadians. There are so many things that happen here in the House of Commons that just happen within the Ottawa bubble and that are constrained to the Ottawa bubble. That is not the case with this dispute.

Canadians are paying attention. Canadians want answers. Canadians deserve the truth and I sincerely hope that there will be some Conservative backbenchers who will listen to their constituents, who will stand and support the motion and support what their constituents want. They want the truth. They want transparency. They deserve it and this is the time for it.

● (1510)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of my friend from the Liberal Party.

Getting the Prime Minister to actually answer some questions with regard to this scandal, which goes right to the heart of his office, is not just in the interests of New Democrats but of all Canadians.

We have seen time and again, and we saw it minutes ago in question period, the Prime Minister refusing to answer the most straightforward and simple questions. There can only be a couple of options: either he is unable and he does not have the information or he is simply unwilling because he knows that telling the straight, consistent version will condemn him in this scandal.

However, the challenge for the Prime Minister, we argue, and my friend did this as well, is that everyone involved in the Wright-Duffy affair is intimately connected to the Prime Minister, so it goes to the heart of his own ethics and judgment.

The Prime Minister was only able to get away with this, and Mike Duffy was only able to do the purported theft, and Wallin, Brazeau and all these guys, because the Senate is so dysfunctional at its heart that it not only allows for this kind of behaviour, it even encourages it. There is no accountability at all.

All we have heard from my friend's party so far about getting at the very roots of this issue is to simply appoint more Liberal senators. Some of them have ended up in jail for some of the same misdeeds, so clearly that is not a solution.

While we want the Prime Minister telling the truth and that is what has to happen in a consistent way, we also need to understand that this is a scandal that, at its heart, is the making of the Prime Minister's terrible judgment. It is also the making of the institution down the hallway that allows parties to put in failed candidates; former and current bagmen, as they themselves admitted; and people who do not rise to a high enough ethical standard to get elected. They are stuffed down there to help out the parties.

Does my friend think it is appropriate behaviour for senators, appointed by their parties, to use taxpayer funding to fundraise on

behalf of those parties, to use that taxpayer money to raise funds for either the Liberal or Conservative parties? It is a very simple, straightforward question.

Mr. Sean Casey: Much of the preamble of that question, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I agreed with. However, as we have seen so many times in this debate, it appears, certainly in the NDP, that members either want to expand the scope or talk about something other than the motion.

The motion is that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses and that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath.

That is what we are talking about. We are talking about conduct in the Prime Minister's Office. We are talking about that dozen or so people. We are talking about the culture within the office that makes it okay to write a script for a senator to mislead Canadians. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about rot within the Prime Minister's Office. That is what the motion is about. That is what we are here to debate. That is what we are putting forward.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words of my colleague from Charlottetown. He is calling on the members opposite in the Conservative Party to support the motion.

I note that there are hon. members in the other place who are calling for due process with the motion in the Senate, and are looking for a proper investigation before there is a decision on repercussions and punishment for the senators. My colleague is assuming there may be some hon. members in the Conservative Party who want to see the air cleared. The air was not cleared at the recent convention in Calgary.

What would my hon. colleague from Charlottetown say to the members opposite so that they could report to their constituents about their obligations and their responsibility in helping to clear the air on this very messy scandal in the Prime Minister's Office?

● (1515)

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that members opposite would be able to say to their constituents that they have faith in the Prime Minister, that they believe the Prime Minister, that the Prime Minister has nothing to hide and therefore he should testify under oath.

That would afford an opportunity to clear the air. That would afford an opportunity for Conservative backbenchers, who rode into Ottawa on the white knight of transparency and accountability, to hold true to the principles that got them here, and not display the jading that comes with being in power too long.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do deserve the truth about Senate abuse. The member for Charlottetown complained at the beginning of his speech that Mike Duffy was not a resident of P.E.I. when appointed. We know in our party, from 1993 to 2003, Percy Downe worked for the Liberal Prime Minister's Office. Then he was chief of staff to Prime Minister Chrétien. He lived in Ottawa for a decade during this time.

Business of Supply

Could the member for Charlottetown confirm that Percy Downe was a resident of P.E.I. when he was appointed as a senator, or was he like Mike Duffy—he had a cottage there and became a resident afterwards?

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the member that Percy Downe can be found on the boardwalk in Victoria Park any Saturday or Sunday morning, walking his dog. He can be found at the farmer's market virtually every single Saturday morning. Percy Downe is widely respected by Islanders. He is one of ours, absolutely. He rose to great heights in the Prime Minister's Office. It is a source of great pride for Islanders. To have someone with the integrity of Percy Downe representing Prince Edward Island in the red chamber is something we are very proud of.

To attempt to stand up in the House and slam someone of the character of Percy Downe is absolutely shameful. Any right-minded Prince Edward Islander would stand up for Percy Downe.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, for months I have been receiving hundreds and hundreds of emails from constituents of Thunder Bay—Superior North calling for Wallin, Duffy and Brazeau to be removed from the Senate. Many were asking that the Senate be removed from Parliament. However, recently that has shifted to “What did the Prime Minister know and when did he know it? Is he telling the truth or not and when will he come clean with whether he is in the right or wrong? When will he be more open in revealing the whole truth in this matter?”

I would just like to support the comments of the member calling for the passage of the motion, which is simple and straightforward. I absolutely agree with it.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments and ringing endorsement. That is exactly the goal that we are seeking to achieve here.

We want to have the Prime Minister testify in a forum where there is no opportunity for deflection, diversion or pivoting, just the straight, unvarnished truth. Canadians deserve that.

The hon. member clearly sees that and I thank him for his support.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the essence of the motion, if passed, would compel the Prime Minister to come forward and testify under oath. The issue before members of Parliament is whether they believe the Prime Minister has and should come clean with Canadians on this issue. I wonder if the member could provide a very brief comment on that.

• (1520)

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, it is well past time. Canadians are paying attention. They want the Prime Minister to come clean. They are not satisfied with the answers they get in question period. One day Nigel Wright resigned, one day Nigel Wright was fired and today he is no longer on the payroll. This is wordsmithing.

It is time to drill down into the facts. It is time to get into a forum where the unvarnished truth can come out. That is what is needed. That is the purpose of the motion. This is what Canadians want.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure once again to stand in this place and debate a motion brought forward by my colleagues in the third party. It should be no

surprise to the members of this place that I certainly will be voting against this motion. There are several reasons for that, only a few of which I will touch upon today in my limited time.

Primarily, I will be voting against this, as most members should, because this is nothing more than a political stunt. The motion brought forward is something the Liberals brought forward hoping will embarrass the government and to try to cause damage to the government, and this is nothing new. I do not begrudge the Liberals the fact that they are bringing a motion forward that they think can gain them some political favour; that is what happens in this place. However, I find it unfortunate that we are doing so at their first opportunity in this new session of Parliament, when there are so many other important issues to debate.

Not only that, I do not know if I am the only one who recognizes the absolute delicious irony in the motion that the Liberals brought forward. What they want to discuss is the fact that there was a \$90,000 cheque paid inappropriately, I admit, but paid back to the taxpayers of Canada to try to stem the abuse made by one of our senators. We can contrast that to the Liberal Party's track record. It is the party that perpetrated and embodied the largest political scandal in Canadian history. I speak, of course, of the sponsorship scandal in which millions of dollars was stolen from Canadian taxpayers and that money was then diverted into Liberal bank accounts. Was any of that money repaid? I can answer that partially because the Liberal Party of Canada did agree—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the member is making very strong allegations that should at least be substantiated to a certain degree. Is the member prepared to indicate what Liberal bank accounts he is specifically referring to?

The Speaker: I am not sure that is a point of order. The hon. member for Winnipeg North can certainly ask questions during the question and comment period.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal members would have shown the same level of enthusiasm trying to get to the bottom of the sponsorship scandal as they have with this motion today, we might have found out where those bank accounts were held.

According to the results and conclusions of the Gomery commission, we know that millions of dollars were stolen by the Liberals and funnelled back into Liberal accounts primarily in Quebec. Even though the Liberal Party admitted culpability and repaid a million dollars of the money that was stolen, there are still tens of millions of dollars that have been unaccounted for. Justice Gomery noted that there was \$40 million that he could not account for, the reason being that the terms of reference set by the Liberals when they established the Gomery commission prevented Justice Gomery from going beyond this narrow perspective. Therefore, he was not able to pursue the trail of that missing \$40 million, that stolen \$40 million.

I would suggest for members opposite that if they truly want to deal with corruption and stolen money, money that was taken from taxpayers, they only have to look at themselves and try to explain to Canadians why that stolen money has still yet to be recovered.

Business of Supply

However, I digress. We all know the credibility problem the Liberals have on that issue. I will not spend too much more time on that.

Besides the irony that I note in this motion, I also note with great interest why, outside of for the obvious political partisan reasons, the Liberals brought forward a motion such as this today. The reason is quite obvious to me. It is because they have nothing else to speak of. They have no policies on virtually anything that is of importance to Canadians. This was their opportunity had they wanted to speak to the Canada-Europe trade agreement. They could have offered critiques, suggestions and analysis. They chose not to. Why? Because they have no position. They have no position on the economy, on the environment and on health care.

The only position and policy brought forward by the Liberal Party to date under the leadership of their new leader, the member for Papineau, is that he would like to see a policy that legalizes marijuana. Whether that is an appropriate policy is up for debate and probably will be debated at some future time, perhaps even in this Parliament. However, I find it passing strange that would be the first policy that the new Liberal leader decided was worthy of comment.

If Canadians were to be well-served by the Liberal Party, or any member in the House, we should have a debate that deals with issues that are of importance to Canadians. The economy is the number one issue that all Canadians are still gripped with. There is a lot of worldwide uncertainty about the state of the economy. We are not out of the woods yet. However, rather than deal with an economic issue, the Liberals decided to bring forward a motion to the House on this day that they believe would do nothing more than advance their political partisan purposes. I will let them live with that, but I would have thought the new leader would expect more of his caucus than to leave this motion on the floor.

I know it is the proper practice of the House to deal with a motion before us, even though I think it is frivolous and a political stunt, so let me try and set some of the record straight.

What we have heard in this Parliament by many members of the opposition, not just the third party but also the official opposition, is a lot of unfounded allegations and a lot of spin. There have been many attempts to try and torque an issue beyond any sense of normalcy. Therefore, let us examine what we know. Let us deal with the facts as we know them, facts that have been confirmed.

First, we know there was an inappropriate payment by Nigel Wright of \$90,000 to cover the inappropriate expenses claimed by Senator Mike Duffy. That is indisputable. That is agreed upon by everyone, including Mr. Wright.

Second, we know, confirmed by Mr. Wright and the Prime Minister, that Mr. Wright acted alone. It was his decision to provide a \$90,000 payment to cover Mike Duffy's expenses. He did not inform the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has stated this in the House on many occasions. Nigel Wright has confirmed this.

● (1525)

Nigel Wright, frankly, has no reason to do anything but tell the truth on this issue. It is not in his best interest to say that the Prime Minister was unaware of this payment. He simply stated the facts and told the truth. The Prime Minister has confirmed that.

We know now that Mr. Duffy tried to get the Prime Minister to agree to repay his expenses. The Prime Minister refused. On February 13, he had a conversation with Senator Duffy and he told him that he must repay his own expenses. To the best of the Prime Minister's knowledge, that is exactly what happened. Senator Duffy went on national television and said that he had repaid it and that he had taken a mortgage on his house to repay the money. We know this is a lie.

The facts are simply this. Mr. Wright acted inappropriately. He made a decision on his own. The Prime Minister was simply unaware of it until May 15, when he heard media reports. As soon as the Prime Minister was aware of what had transpired, he went public to confirm it.

Is this a cover-up? Clearly not. How can he cover something up when he admits that a transgression had been made and that improper payments had been made? It simply does not make sense.

Let me deal with a couple of examples that underscore what I have been saying about how the opposition attempts to spin a story like this out of control and how it likes to torque up its rhetoric to try to make a situation that should never have occurred in the first place sound even more ominous and more sinister.

There is one example that the members of the opposition have been fond of raising in the last couple of weeks and that was, in fact, just raised by the previous speaker on the Liberal benches. Somehow, there is this great flip-flop on behalf of the Prime Minister as to whether Nigel Wright resigned or was fired. To me, that is largely irrelevant. What we know is that Mr. Wright met with the Prime Minister after the story of Mr. Wright's payment came to surface. They both agreed that what he did was wrong. They both agreed that he had to leave the Prime Minister's employ.

Was it a resignation? Was it a dismissal? It does not matter. The issue is what he did was wrong and he had to leave. They both agreed. For that reason, Mr. Wright is no longer employed by the PMO.

The members opposite seem to think, for some reason, that the differentiation they point out between a resignation and a dismissal is something that should concern all Canadians. Why? What is at issue is whether Nigel Wright should have paid the price for his actions, and he did. The Prime Minister was insistent upon that. Nigel Wright agreed with it. Whether he officially resigned, or whether he was asked to resign or whether he was dismissed is of no consequence, as I argue it.

The fact is that he admitted a wrongdoing. He informed the Prime Minister that he had kept the information secret from him, and the Prime Minister agreed with Nigel Wright that it was unacceptable. Both of them agreed that he could no longer work in the Prime Minister's Office.

Where is the controversy? Where is the furor that the opposition is trying to raise, based on dismissal versus resignation? That is why I say it is largely irrelevant. What is relevant is that what Nigel Wright did was wrong and he had to pay a price, as does Senator Duffy.

Business of Supply

As the Prime Minister and many others in this place have noted on several occasions over the last few weeks, not only did Senator Duffy inappropriately claim expenses which he did not incur, he has still not repaid that money. The taxpayers have recovered the money, but that was because of Nigel Wright's actions. Senator Duffy still has not repaid the money.

Nigel Wright paid the price for his wrongdoing. Senator Duffy should do the same.

• (1530)

Let me give yet another example of how the opposition is trying to torque this story into something larger than it needs to be, how it is trying to take small examples of words, of actions, and make a point that somehow this proves the Prime Minister's involvement in all of this; because it actually makes no sense whatsoever.

The latest thing coming from members of the opposition, and I find this fairly amusing, is that they are defending Nigel Wright and saying the Prime Minister somehow threw him under the bus. On one hand, the opposition members have continually said the Prime Minister must come clean, be more forthright and candid in Parliament about what occurred, yet when the Prime Minister did exactly that by saying he was deceived by Nigel Wright, the opposition members are now saying the Prime Minister is changing his story and throwing Nigel Wright under the bus. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The facts are these, as corroborated by Mr. Wright himself. Mr. Wright did not tell the Prime Minister of his plans to secretly repay Mr. Duffy's expenses. That is a deception. Frankly, I think the world of Nigel Wright. He is a man of extraordinarily high character. Unfortunately, in this particular case, he exhibited extraordinarily poor judgment. He made a terrible mistake and it has cost him. He has admitted his mistake.

When the Prime Minister answers questions in this place by saying that he and the Canadian public were deceived by Mr. Wright, he is merely stating the facts. He is simply telling the truth. Once he had done that, the opposition members found yet another reason to criticize the Prime Minister, asking how he could, weeks ago, call Mr. Wright honourable and now throw him under the bus by saying he has deceived him. Well, he did. Nigel Wright did not tell the Prime Minister about his plans to give a personal cheque to repay the obligations of Senator Duffy. I am sorry. As much as I am a fan of Nigel Wright, I say that is deception. Nigel Wright admits he deceived the Prime Minister, and he admits he was wrong in doing so.

While I know the opposition members are seized with this issue and spend almost all of their time in question period trying to embarrass the Prime Minister and our government, the facts are very clear. Number one, a \$90,000 cheque was given by Nigel Wright to cover the improper expenses claimed and received by Senator Duffy. Number two, the Prime Minister was not aware of this plan to use Nigel Wright's personal resources to repay the money. Number three, both Nigel Wright and the Prime Minister agreed that it was inappropriate that he continue to work in the Prime Minister's Office, that it was appropriate that he be sanctioned, and sanctioned he was.

The final issue that should be of importance, not only to members of the House but to all Canadians, is that the actions of certain senators in the other place should not be tolerated. Those actions have proven to be unacceptable, improper and potentially illegal. We will see what the results of the RCMP investigations into some of the senators' actions say about that.

Without question, not only should they be required to repay the inappropriate expenses they have taken from the Canadian taxpayer, but they should be sanctioned. That type of action, abusing the public taxpayers' funds, should not be tolerated by members of this place and certainly not by members in the other place. Our position, which we have been stating from the outset, is simply that because wrongdoing was uncovered by certain senators, they have to have consequences attached to their actions. There should be sanctions.

• (1535)

Those sanctions, in our view, are to remove those senators from the public payroll. Hopefully later today, we will find that the Senate itself, as an institution, agrees with our position and has taken remedial action to remove these senators from the public payroll.

I would only ask that members of the Liberal caucus in this place tell their members of the Senate caucus in the other place to join with us and our senators in demanding sanctions for wrongdoing, because that is what it comes down to; nothing more, nothing less.

When the public purse is abused, when taxpayers are abused, when wrongdoing has been uncovered, sanctions and repercussions must occur. We are asking for that. Canadian people are asking for that. We simply ask Liberals to join with us in administering those sanctions.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the deputy House leader with great interest, as always, and I have to say that we do sometimes find common ground. He began by saying that he thought this motion by the Liberals was perhaps a political stunt. On some level, I have to agree with that.

I mean, it is true that, while our leader had exchanges with the Conservatives 43 times last week, the Liberals only asked three of 45 questions on this issue; so why this motion today? The member is right: it is the NDP that has been taking this issue seriously and that has been taking leadership on this file.

Moreover, we know that the Liberals voted against the NDP motion to restrict senator travel and partisan activities. That too puts their motivation into question. Of course, we know they want to deflect attention from their own corruption in the Senate with Liberal senators like Mac Harb.

I do have a question for the deputy House leader.

Business of Supply

We see him rise a lot in the House. People watching this debate here today will remember that he often stands up and tables documents in the House on behalf of the government. I wonder whether he would agree today to table all of those documents in this House that are related to the issue of the Prime Minister's knowledge of Nigel Wright in the Duffy affair. I wonder whether he would agree today to stand in the House and table all documents, so that we can ascertain when the story will actually stop changing.

• (1540)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, there is, of course, a procedural mistake that my colleague on the opposition benches makes. Since I am not a minister, I could not table those documents even if I had them.

I will point out, as we have pointed out many times in this House, that our government and the Prime Minister's Office is co-operating fully with the RCMP investigation. We make no bones about the fact that there is an investigation. We will do whatever it takes to co-operate with officials as they try to determine exactly if, for example, there are charges to be laid against certain senators. We will certainly co-operate with any request the RCMP makes to provide documents. That is, without question, something we have confirmed many times.

I know the member opposite is trying to play a few political games here, but the reality is that our government is co-operating fully. We want to ensure that, if there has been wrongdoing on behalf of certain senators in the other place, if there has been fraudulent activity, if there has been misappropriation of funds, not only are they sanctioned by the senators themselves but the appropriate authorities make their sanctions known, and we hope it is done quickly.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary to be of very strong character, and he has done a lot of good work here in the House of Commons.

I guess the challenge for me is why we are not waiting for due process. I know people are angry and there is all this political fallout, but at the end of the day, we as parliamentarians would not be respecting process.

If things were going along, the investigation was being done and all of the information was apparently coming forward, why was it not possible for the government to let the RCMP complete its work so that due process is seen?

All of us as parliamentarians, and the parliamentary secretary in particular, have argued on behalf of due process on many issues many times and have been quite successful. To see the rush to judgment now is an issue with which I have great difficulty.

I have no sympathy for the violations; and whatever comes will come because they deserve it. The question is: Why is it that the Senate cannot wait until the RCMP is finished its work and then take the necessary action?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her kind comments about my character.

Even though I believe her to be sincere in her comments about believing that due process has not been achieved, I have to argue that, in fact, it has. This issue has been percolating in the Senate for

several months now. There was an audit completed by Deloitte & Touche that has clearly indicated that abuses were made, that improper expenses were claimed and received by senators. That is due process.

She referred to the ongoing RCMP investigation. I tend to agree with her: let it do its work because it is investigating whether criminal charges should be laid. The wrongdoing on behalf of these senators has already been established. They took money improperly from expense claims that they did not incur. That is indisputable. Therefore, how can the member opposite suggest and argue in this place that due process has not been followed?

What we and our colleagues in the Senate are suggesting is that those senators who have been proven to have taken improper expenses be sanctioned, be removed from the public payroll. That is not to say that they will not have their day in court. If the RCMP chooses to lay charges, they will have due process in our system of law in this country. However, the fact is, and it is indisputable, that wrong expense claims were made, improper payments were made, and we have to take action now. That is our obligation.

• (1545)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for what I would call an outstanding speech in the House.

I have to question the member about the hypocrisy of this motion before the House today and who has brought this motion. If we look at the party, it is the party of the sponsorship scandal, a party that has refused to be clean and straight with Canadians about where that money went and what riding associations in Quebec actually benefited from it, and there are over \$40 million still outstanding. We look at a party whose members, some of whom are still in the House today, paid rent payments to family members—something that is a matter of fact—from the House of Commons, and paid that money back after being caught. I cannot say who paid it back or who it was paid back to, but I am told that it was paid back. It is this party, the Liberal Party, that has brought this motion to the House.

The abuse of the public trust in terms of the public funds, especially for members who are well paid—they are well paid in the other place, too—is despicable. I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend, the member for Peterborough, for his comments.

As I mentioned in the body of my speech a few moments ago, I found it at least to be—perhaps being gentle on the Liberals—deliciously ironic that they raised this. My friend used the term “hypocrisy” and that is probably more accurate. Yes, the Liberal Party of Canada has a history of abusing the taxpayers' trust, not only in the sponsorship scandal but, as my friend points out, there have been a couple of instances where Liberal Party members have been found guilty of abusing their own housing allowances and have been forced to repay the money, I suppose, to the House of Commons, which forwarded the expense payments to them in the first place.

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It just reinforces and underscores what I was saying from the outset, that this motion is nothing more than a political stunt on behalf of the Liberal Party. There is no substance to this. It is trying to create an embarrassment. It is trying to cause some discomfort on our side as a result of this. If Liberals truly felt that they had something to add to the discourse in the House, they would have provided for the House a motion to debate on something substantive, whether it be economic policy, environmental policy, foreign policy or anything. Unfortunately, since they have no policies on any of those issues, this is the best they could do. Shame on them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with the sponsorship scandal, after the Bloc Québécois gleaned some information, it asked over 400 questions in the House, people started to testify, emails circulated and journalists got information out. What happened next? The Gomery commission was set up.

Now we have a Senate scandal, “Senategate”. I have heard and we all have heard the information that is circulating about it. The Prime Minister's credibility is at stake because his story is different in almost every question period.

Why are the parties in the House not doing what the Bloc Québécois has been calling for from the start, as was done with the Gomery commission and as they are doing in Quebec City with the Charbonneau commission? An independent public inquiry should be set up and require the Prime Minister and the people involved to testify under oath. Witnesses will have to give their answers on the spot and provide the relevant documents. Right now, it is a mess and a shambles.

Why is the government not setting up this kind of independent public inquiry?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I would just point out the difference between what we are talking about here, the Duffy affair, and the sponsorship scandal. It is almost like night and day. The situation we have here is that \$90,000 was repaid to taxpayers, albeit inappropriately. All of the parties involved admitted their culpability. Nigel Wright said that yes, he did it. He said that it was wrong, but he did it.

With the sponsorship scandal, we had Liberal Party members denying their involvement. It took a commission, headed by Justice Gomery, to find out exactly what happened. That was far different from this. This was \$90,000 improperly repaid, and admitted to, as opposed to a systemic attempt on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada to defraud taxpayers and deny its involvement.

That is the difference. That is why there was a Gomery Commission. That is why there is no need for one here.

• (1550)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

Given that I only have a few minutes to talk, let me pick up on the point the government just made. When we look at the Gomery inquiry, there is a difference between the style of leadership of

former Prime Minister Paul Martin and the current Prime Minister and what is taking place inside the office.

When former Prime Minister Paul Martin recognized that the public, Canadians, wanted to see action coming from the prime minister, he delivered on that. He was not intimidated. He was not scared. He was not running for cover. He acknowledged it and took it upon himself to do the right thing. That is what we are challenging the current Prime Minister to do: the right thing.

In the last week, I have been canvassing in Pinawa, which is in the Provencher constituency. I have had the opportunity to meet with individuals at my local McDonald's and with many other constituents. I can tell members that what is top of mind is the Prime Minister's Office.

The official opposition has been dismal in terms of addressing this issue today. It wants to focus its attention on being critical of the Liberal Party and exaggerating that we asked three questions versus their 20 questions, or whatever number it is.

The Liberal Party has been up every day asking questions on this issue. The opposition's drivel makes no sense. My advice to the official opposition is to focus on the issue at hand, and the issue at hand is the Prime Minister's Office.

I do not believe what we are hearing from the Prime Minister on this issue. Canadians are not believing. When I knock on doors or meet with people, the response I get is that they cannot believe what has taken place. Everyone is aware of it. There has not been one individual on whose door I knocked who did not want to talk about the Prime Minister's Office and what was happening with regard to the Senate scandal. There is a keen interest in trying to get to the truth.

We have disgraced Senator Mike Duffy. People have been following that for months. I can tell members that in many ways, Mr. Duffy actually has more credibility on the issue, in terms of being truthful, than our current Prime Minister. It is a fact that Canadians are losing confidence in the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office.

This is not some trickery, in terms of the motion. Only the New Democrats and the Conservatives would say that it is a gimmick. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are challenging the government. We are providing an opportunity for the Prime Minister of our land to make a very clear statement. If he wants to redeem himself in the minds of Canadians, the best thing he can do is go under oath, because the Prime Minister has been very selective with the truth. One day we hear that Mr. Wright was the only individual within the office who knew. Then we find, because of the RCMP investigation, that there were a dirty dozen of them. There were 13.

How many people actually did know about it inside the Prime Minister's Office? All the Prime Minister originally said was one: Mr. Wright. Now he says a few people. Then he talks about how tough he is getting with these individuals who hid it from him, Mr. Duffy and the other two senators.

What about those other 13 people who have all been roped into this? They are playing prominent roles in other ministries. There has been no action against those individuals.

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•(1555)

He is being very selective in what he is telling Canadians. That is the best-case scenario.

We know that Mike Duffy was told to lie. He was supposed to say that the money he was borrowing was for a mortgage. Who was the one who told him that? That came out of the Prime Minister's Office. That is a fairly serious allegation.

The government representative stood up and said that we have other issues before us, such as the European Union and health care, which I am not sure he mentioned, and other issues. Yes, those are all important issues. However, I would suggest that the integrity of the Prime Minister and of the Prime Minister's Office are of utmost importance.

New Democrats want to focus on saying that it is only them. I would suggest that we need to start focusing on what the resolution says. It is fairly simple. It is saying, in essence, that we want to provide a forum in which the Prime Minister of Canada can come before a committee and provide testimony. The key is that it would be under oath. I believe that Canadians, not just the members of the Liberal Party, would support the initiative to see the Prime Minister testify under oath, given the magnitude of the issue before us today.

The question is why we do not have members of the Conservative caucus standing up defending their Prime Minister or indicating what they would like to see. What have we got to lose by allowing this motion to pass? If the motion passes, the Prime Minister would be afforded the opportunity to go before a committee of his peers for three hours. We would have live coverage. Why live? It is because Canadians are interested. It is almost like a daily soap opera. Canadians are following this issue, and they want and deserve to know the truth. That is why we want to ensure that it is televised and that the Prime Minister is obligated to explain things under oath. We have consistently argued that. We want to see the Prime Minister acknowledge the importance of that.

Tomorrow we are going to have a vote on this issue. The member from the Conservative government said that he wants the facts. Canadians also want and deserve the facts.

If they have nothing to hide, why would they not support this motion? This motion is just trying to ensure that the Prime Minister has an opportunity to redeem himself in front of all Canadians and members of the House.

•(1600)

Why would one not support that opportunity? That is my challenge to members of the Conservative Party.

If they vote against the motion, then what is it that they want to hide? Why do they not want Canadians to know the full truth? Why do they not want a Prime Minister to be afforded the opportunity to be able to redeem himself to all Canadians?

I challenge the members to support the motion. It is a good motion.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is funny listening to the member talk about Paul Martin. Let us

remember that Paul Martin was under the illusion that he was going to win 280 seats. The Gomery commission was more about trying to ruin the reputation of Jean Chrétien than it was about trying to get to the bottom of what happened in the sponsorship scandal.

Last week the Liberals were talking about how immature the NDP was for bringing the motion forward with respect to the activities of the Senate, but as has been rightfully pointed out by members of the opposition and as I said earlier today, while I do not necessarily agree that this should be the priority of the opposition, the NDP have made it their priority. They get up and ask a lot of questions and their leader asks a lot of questions in the House because it is a priority for them.

However, the Liberals have been completely silent and absent. Now they are trying to tell people that it has to go to the ethics committee for further investigation where the Liberals will get one question. Therefore, what they are saying again is that they want the NDP to do the work that they are too embarrassed to have their leader do.

That is what they are really saying. That is what the motion is about. The Liberal leader is so embarrassed by the fact that he has been outclassed in the House of Commons by our leader and by the Leader of the Opposition that he either wants to try to regain the spotlight or he wants to get it off the table because he is going to continue to fight for the status quo in the Senate. Canadians do not want that.

How does this member reconcile the fact that he thinks it is so important to get in front of the ethics committee, when his member at the ethics committee will get one question? How does one question get to the bottom of such an important issue for the Liberal Party?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the question is ridiculous, quite frankly.

The member says a few questions is all we have asked. He sits there and has been answering or attempting to answer or filibustering the questions that the Liberal Party has been asking every day. The member goes on some tangent about pizza and whatever else to avoid accountability on the issue.

The Liberal Party does not have to apologize for anything, whether it is the leader of the Liberal Party or the member for Wascana or any other member of the caucus. We have been aggressively pursuing this issue, whether it is inside the House of Commons or inside the Senate chamber. That is the reality of it.

The member wants to talk about strength of leadership. He made reference to former prime minister Paul Martin. Paul Martin did not go running. He did not attempt to hide. He was prepared to face the truth. Most importantly, he wanted Canadians to know the truth. That is what we want.

We want this Prime Minister to do the right thing and allow Canadians to know the truth, to demonstrate some of the leadership that goes along with the responsibility of being the Prime Minister, and to take responsibility.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we see what the debate has come to.

We see the passion with which the Liberals are standing up for their future retirement home and, on the other side, all the energy the Conservatives can put into trying to preserve the pool of labour they need at election time to travel across the country at taxpayers' expense.

What Canadians want right now is for the Prime Minister to take responsibility for the people he recruited himself. If he cannot speak to his integrity, he could at least speak to his judgment in hiring those people.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude with this. It is very important that we do not allow the government of the day to change the channel.

I say that with all sincerity to my New Democratic colleagues. The core issue here is in fact the cover-up attempt and the misinformation, not telling the full truth, inside the Prime Minister's Office.

We should not let the PMO's office and the Prime Minister off the hook. The motion is very clear. We want to see, on behalf of all Canadians, the Prime Minister testify in committee under oath. That is what we believe is important. That is the reason we brought the motion forward. We hope and trust that the New Democrats will see it for that and vote in favour of the motion tomorrow.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, The Environment; and the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Aboriginal Affairs.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a rarity, I suppose, for me to rise to participate in a debate. I thank my friend from Winnipeg North for sharing his time with me and allowing me to put a couple of comments on the record regarding this very important motion.

I come to this issue with a slightly different perspective than previous speakers in that I was elected as a Conservative, as I think members of the House know. I support the Prime Minister, although no longer unequivocally since I left his caucus. I now have taken the position that, as an independent member of Parliament, I will examine government bills and legislation on a piecemeal basis and support those that I think are meritorious and for the benefit of my constituents and oppose those that are not. That applies, of course, to opposition motions as well.

When I look at the opposition motion that we are debating here this afternoon, it is with some reluctance that I have come to the conclusion that I have to support the motion. I am reluctant for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it has come to this, that the Liberal opposition has had to use one of its opposition days to raise a motion to compel the Prime Minister of Canada to appear before the access to information and ethics committee to testify

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under oath as to what he did or did not know concerning what is consuming the Canadian public as the Wright-Duffy scandal.

It is sad that it has come to this point because I believe in responsible government. In the British parliamentary system, the government is responsible to Canadian citizens through this elected chamber. Canadians elect parliamentarians, 308 of us currently and there will be a few more after the next election, and our job is to hold the government to account. Had the government been more forthcoming with respect to what it knew and did not know, I do not believe the motion would be necessary. The fact that it is necessary I find very regrettable.

I, too, hear from hundreds of constituents on topics regarding virtually every aspect of government. However, in the last six months no single topic has dominated the emails, phone calls and casual conversations with my constituents more than the so-called Senate scandal. However, it is not a Senate scandal. The problems with respect to the Senate expenses are big problems, but they are, in my view, the least significant aspect of all of this. As offended as I suspect most Canadians are that senators are alleged to have claimed housing and travel expenses they were not entitled to, and they are outraged at that, the bigger issue in my view and in the view of Canadians and constituents I have talked to is the Prime Minister's involvement with respect to one of those senators, that of course being Senator Duffy.

The bombshell was dropped in this place on May 14 or 15 that the former chief of staff to the Prime Minister had cut a cheque in the amount of some \$90,000 to reimburse Canadian taxpayers for Senator Duffy's ineligible expense claims. That raised many questions, not the least of which was what the quid pro quo was. What did the Prime Minister's Office and the chief of staff expect that senator to do in exchange for this very generous gift of \$90,000? Of course, we have heard all sorts of allegations and suggestions.

The senator has indicated in the other place that there was some massive conspiracy orchestrated by the Prime Minister's Office to make that scandal go away, which was becoming a political scandal, and therefore, I suspect, salvage the reputation of a senator who at one time was a very loyal and valued member of the Conservative caucus and the Conservative Party, especially on the fundraising circuit. The problem I have with all of this, from what I hear in the other place and in question period on a daily basis, is that none of this qualifies as evidence.

There are many lawyers in this room and we should be very concerned about what is happening in both chambers of Parliament. Everything is protected by privilege, none of it is under oath and none of it is subject to cross-examination, yet very serious allegations have been made. It has been suggested that the Prime Minister's Office may have breached the Criminal Code of Canada and the Parliament of Canada Act with respect to influencing a sitting legislator. That is a very serious charge that, if made out, could result in jail time for those convicted.

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•(1610)

On the other side of the equation, of course, are three senators whose very offices are held in the balance of a vote that I suspect is going to take place within 90 minutes. They have not been criminally charged, but they have been accused of being, shall I say, “creative” with respect to their expense accounts.

Again, there is all sorts of contrary evidence with respect to those suggestions. There appears to be more or less compliance with the audits that were undertaken, but the legislative committees that examined those audits came to different conclusions and made certain orders. Some of those orders have been complied with, and in the case of Senator Duffy, under some fairly unorthodox matters.

This is where I wish, quite frankly, in the House of Commons during question period that Canadians and parliamentarians would get the answers that we deserve. We believe in responsible government. We have had responsible government in this country since before we were a country. In 1848 in Nova Scotia, Joseph Howe was the premier of the then colony of Nova Scotia, the first colony anywhere in colonial Britain to achieve responsible government.

It is a very simple concept. The government, the cabinet, the executive is responsible to the democratically elected chamber, which is this place. Therefore, it is in this place that, all things working out as they should, the Prime Minister ought to, in my view, answer the questions from the opposition, from the third party and from members of his own caucus if they were so inclined to ask with respect to what the Prime Minister knew and when he knew it.

I have consistently believed the Prime Minister, and I have been very public about this. I have been asked many times and I have always indicated that I believe the Prime Minister's version of events, that he was kept in the dark regarding this highly unusual, unorthodox and possibly illegal transaction between his former chief of staff and a sitting senator. However, I am not sure that ends it.

We live under the parliamentary concept of the convention of responsible government. The Prime Minister is responsible for the operation of two departments of that government: one is the Prime Minister's Office and the other is the Privy Council Office. The Prime Minister is responsible to this democratically elected chamber for what goes on there.

Based on the dribs and drabs of information that we have received during question period, we know that there were some very unorthodox activities, possibly illegal activities, between the then chief of staff and three sitting senators. It is incumbent upon the Prime Minister to answer not only for what he knew or did not know, and he has been very clear about what he did not know, but also to answer for the operation of the department that bears his name. He is the PM in the PMO, the Prime Minister's Office.

It is a systemic breakdown of a system with no checks and balances, even within the Prime Minister's Office, involving a rogue chief of staff and apparently several other individuals, a few according to the Prime Minister and up to 11 or 12 according to some media reports. That this type of systemic breakdown could occur where that number of individuals would be involved or at least

have knowledge of an operation and could somehow keep the Prime Minister unapprised of it, I think, is worthy of examination.

The Prime Minister ought to come forward with some candour with respect to what goes on in his office. How can this type of activity go on without his knowing about it?

I was elected as a Conservative. I am one of those who came to Ottawa on a so-called “white horse” to clean up government. I believe in the Prime Minister, but I would think that he would want the opportunity to salvage his reputation and that of his government by appearing before a committee, since the Conservatives do not seem to be inclined to do it in the House of Commons during question period.

Admittedly, question period only allows for very brief questions and even briefer answers, and seldom are they ever really answered anyway. However, a committee, where people have multiple rounds of questions and can follow up, would be an opportunity for the government to come clean and for the Prime Minister to restore the integrity of his office.

I think it is important that the Prime Minister do so, because the integrity of the Prime Minister is fundamental to Canadians' belief in their government.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this shows that, when you are in power, people come knocking on your door to abuse that power. No political party will ever be immune from that type of situation. The Duffys of this world will always show up at politicians' doors. The question is how you handle that type of situation.

Clearly, like the Liberals in the past, the Conservatives do not have an answer. I hope that we who aspire to take power will come up with a better answer. However, the last thing you want to do when faced with corruption is to suggest a partisan solution. Right now, what the Liberals are suggesting is to put the Prime Minister on the spot, not find a solution to corruption. That is probably the crux of the issue.

I urge my Liberal colleagues to realize that they are not finding a solution to corruption. What they are suggesting is to put the Prime Minister on the spot and hide their problems. However, the problems of the Liberals and the Conservatives, as well as our problems in the future, will be the same.

On that note, I would like to know how the Liberal Party is going to come up with a long-term solution to all those problems and put a stop to the attempts at corruption.

[*English*]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, I do not speak for the Liberal Party, so I cannot answer that question. I can comment on what the member indicated earlier on how we restore confidence in Canadians that the government of the day is responsible and acting in an open and transparent method. I do not have an easy answer to that question.

During the 45 minutes per day of question period in this chamber, it has been almost exclusively consumed with this issue since we came back after Thanksgiving. The nation's business is really being put on a shelf as this chamber, especially during question period, is almost entirely consumed with this one issue.

I do not know what the perfect method is for the government to convince Canadians that it is open and transparent. Question period does not seem to be working, so that is why I support the motion to have the Prime Minister appear before a parliamentary committee.

• (1620)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize in my hon. colleague an integrity that is all around him when he talks. He is talking from a position of someone who has had tremendous hurt and pain as a result of his political choices and he stands here and fights on behalf of democracy and integrity in this chamber.

The fact that the Liberal motion is asking for the Prime Minister to be honest with Canadians and with all of us in Parliament does not seem so difficult. It is unfortunate that it has taken a motion from the House to possibly make that happen. I realize we are talking about integrity.

Does the hon. member have any questions or suggestions as to how else we might accomplish getting the Prime Minister to be honest with Canadians?

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, I would be the last person the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office would take any advice from on this issue or any other.

As some members know, before I served in this place I also had the honour of serving in the Alberta legislature. In that capacity I served under former, now deceased, premier Ralph Klein. He had a very different methodology when it came to dealing with problems or even crises.

He would get in front of the issue and would hold a press conference. He would have a *mea culpa*. He would explain what he knew. The media was very responsive and he found out that the Alberta electorate could be very forgiving. I think a little contrition and openness and transparency would go a long way to restoring the confidence of Canadians in the government.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be part of this debate in a sense. I wish we did not need to have this debate on a motion calling on the information, privacy and ethics committee to be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses and on the Prime Minister to be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the committee for a period of three hours.

It is to some degree humiliating to the Prime Minister, to his members of Parliament, to the Conservative Party and to Canada that we have to put a motion forward asking the head of the government to be honest with Canadians. How humiliating it must be for the Prime Minister to have one of the former members of his party and his caucus, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert, plead for an honest response from his former leader, the Prime Minister, as to what he knew and when he knew it. How humiliating it must be for the Prime Minister to be begged to take responsibility for what

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occurred in his office, the office he is in charge of and a government he is in charge of, which is led by a party of which he is the leader.

As an official observer at the recent convention of the Conservative Party of Canada in Calgary, I was struck by the initial subdued atmosphere at the convention, but it was also an atmosphere of waiting expectantly. That was not just the atmosphere at that convention, but the atmosphere across the country where Canadians, who have been following this, were waiting for the air to be cleared.

We are in a situation where well over half of Canadians do not know whether to believe their Prime Minister's or Senator Duffy's version of what took place. When two-thirds of Canadians are unable to trust that their Prime Minister is telling the truth, that is a humiliation not only for the government, but also for our country. One out of two Conservative voters do not trust that their Prime Minister is telling the truth and do not know whom to believe when there are two different stories. That is a significant and very worrisome situation when there has been systemic lack of clarity on the part of the Prime Minister, whose story has changed again and again.

As the member for Edmonton—St. Albert just declared, this is bad for our country. He was very eloquent in talking about the consequences when the integrity of the Prime Minister of the country is in question, that it is bad for our political system and for our democracy.

That expectant atmosphere in Calgary was awaiting the Prime Minister's speech on Friday night. The Prime Minister had an opportunity to speak to the nation and address this crisis in his government, which has been mounting since last February. I will give examples showing the changes in the Prime Minister's version of events that are symbolic of a lack of integrity and the question that has built in people's minds about whether he is telling the truth.

On May 16, the Prime Minister's Office put out a statement with regard to Mr. Wright who was the chief of staff to the Prime Minister in the PMO. The statement was, "Mr. Wright will not be resigning... Mr. Wright has the full support of the Prime Minister".

• (1625)

On May 19, the Prime Minister's Office put out a statement from the Prime Minister, which said:

It is with great regret that I have accepted the resignation of Nigel Wright as my Chief of Staff. I accept that Nigel believed he was acting in the public interest, but I understand the decision he has taken to resign. I want to thank Nigel for his tremendous contribution to our Government over the past two and a half years.

On June 5, the Prime Minister stated the following, in the House of Commons:

—it was Mr. Wright who made the decision to take his personal funds and give those to Mr. Duffy so that Mr. Duffy could reimburse the taxpayers. Those were his decisions. They were not communicated to me or to members of my office.

We know that is not true.

On October 28, the Prime Minister stated, in a radio interview, "look, I think the responsibility whenever things go wrong is for us to take appropriate action. As you know, I had a chief of staff who made an inappropriate payment to Mr. Duffy. He was dismissed".

First, he resigned, then he was dismissed.

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On October 29, the Prime Minister said the following, in the House of Commons:

—on our side there is one person responsible for this deception, and that person is Mr. Wright, by his own admission.

Now it has gone from supporting this person, to regretfully accepting his resignation, to accusing him of deception.

What are Canadians to believe when a prime minister changes his story?

When one reads this, the responsibility when things go wrong, on our side there is one person responsible.

Canadians when they hear “responsible”, they believe it is the Prime Minister who is responsible. It is the Prime Minister who is effectively the president and CEO of this organization. That is what heads of organizations do. They take responsibility when there has been an action where funds have been paid to silence a sitting senator and funds have been paid to pay the legal bills to negotiate a cover-up. This is a serious matter. Who is responsible?

Back to Calgary. The public was expecting to hear some words of acceptance of personal responsibility for the situation. The president and CEO, effectively, of the organization, the dual organizations, the Conservative Party of Canada and the Government of Canada, is the Prime Minister. Was this person going to accept any responsibility whatsoever? The public was expecting that would happen and my guess is the Conservative members of his party were expecting that would happen. One out of two Conservative voters who do not know whether to trust that the Prime Minister has told the truth.

My guess is that the Prime Minister's caucus was in Calgary anticipating that the Prime Minister might accept some personal responsibility for the situation. He could have acknowledged that he was the head of this organization, that he personally appointed Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy so he was responsible. He could have told them what he would do to accept his responsibilities and how he would demonstrate his integrity in this situation and take action.

Did he do that? Absolutely not.

He spoke, once again, about responsibility as if it was something he understood and then failed to take one molecule of responsibility in the situation and essentially went on with a continuation of blaming other individuals and other organizations for the situation.

That is why the Prime Minister, who is completely out of touch with the expectations of normal human beings, a person in charge would take responsibility, have integrity and tell the truth, is being subjected to the humiliating situation of a motion requiring that he testify under oath in a televised committee so Canadians can find out what actually happened.

This is a government and it is a party that prides itself on its connections with the private sector, with the business community.

● (1630)

I will not go so far as to say that it is doing a good job in terms of the economy, but it is certainly a government that would claim that free enterprise and the private sector is one of its important constituents.

How does the Prime Minister explain to the private sector how completely out of alignment with any norms or ethics, in terms of responsibility for problems, the Prime Minister's behaviour demonstrates he is? It is antithetical to what we expect of any organization where there has been a mistake made, where there has been an error in judgment. There is no longer a corporation in this country that would have this kind of scandal, corruption, bribery, cover-up, or change in story by the CEO and president of the organization without clear repercussions. In any corporation that made a mistake or had a problem, responsibility would be accepted at the top.

In the private sector, if it was the president and CEO who was implicated, as it is in the case of the Prime Minister, the head of this organization, who met with the senator in question and the chief of staff, according to Senator Duffy, and who has changed his story, that president and CEO would be shown the door by the board of directors immediately.

I had the privilege of working in the private sector for 25 years before entering politics. The organization I worked in had a number of contract crews. In the early days, they were completing contracts for our clients in reforestation across the country. The project manager in the field was responsible for the results of a project. Even if the weather was not co-operating, even if somebody else let them down, even if a vehicle had problems due to someone else's actions, even if some of the equipment was taken in an unauthorized way and was not available, it was the project manager who was responsible for the result of that contract. That is what we do when we are in charge. If we are in charge of a project, we take responsibility. In the private sector, one does not point fingers and say, “Yes, I'm in charge, but it is not me. Somebody else has to be responsible.” One takes responsibility.

It has been shocking to me, as a businessperson, to see the head of this organization fail utterly on that level. The private sector could not function if this were the norm. If the head of an organization demonstrated a lack of integrity, changed his or her story, blamed others for what happened, hid the truth, allowed it to leak out bit by bit, and tried to manoeuvre around it, changing the story bit by bit, that organization would have absolutely no credibility.

If we had a pipeline company, and the pipeline leaked, and the CEO and president of that company pretended that it did not happen, and when he or she could no longer pretend that it did not happen blamed whoever had pointed out that it had happened—maybe the homeowners whose water and fields had been contaminated by the oil—and changed the story as the truth came out, that CEO would be history. He or she would have no more credibility in that or any other industry.

Integrity is key to effectively working in groups and leading projects. This is a prime minister who is at the head of a government. It is unbelievable that we can have this kind of modelling of poor integrity for the young people in our country who are potentially interested in politics and how this country operates.

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•(1635)

Everyone can make a mistake, so it is not about never making a mistake. It is not about being perfect. It is about taking responsibility for one's mistakes. It is about taking responsibility for the organization one leads. That kind of behaviour is important for young people and for the rest of our society to see in the head of our country, which is our Prime Minister. We are not seeing that. That is why I call this a humiliating day, not just for the members opposite, their leader, and the Conservative Party but for Canadians, our parliamentary system, and our democracy.

We are calling on the Prime Minister to accept responsibility and end the response of attacking others. What we have heard from the Prime Minister are untruths about the Liberal Party and the motion in the Senate. They are to distract Canadians into thinking that this is about a Senate motion and a Senate debate and that this is about the actions of one, two, or three senators. No, this is actually about the absence of the integrity of the Prime Minister, a cover-up in the Prime Ministers Office, a bribe to pay off and silence a senator the Prime Minister was concerned would tarnish the reputation of his party, and potentially illegal activities. We know, because the RCMP are now investigating the Prime Minister's office, that potentially criminal actions have taken place in the Prime Minister's office.

The integrity of our parliamentary system requires the Prime Minister to step up and accept his responsibility and be willing to clarify what happened. No more changed stories, no more attacks, no more distractions, and no more punting the questions over to a parliamentary secretary who wants to talk about bologna pizza. This issue is far more serious than that. It is the integrity of the government that is at stake. It is the believability of the government that is at stake.

A person of great eminence in our history, Mahatma Gandhi, said that the moment a person's word is in question, everything he does is tainted, and that is what we have with the Prime Minister. This is a person whose integrity, whose word, is in question, and that means that everything he does is tainted. What the Prime Minister said about the Canada-EU free trade agreement is no longer believable. It is tainted.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Oh, come on. Get serious.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Name the legislation or policy; the moment a person's word is in question, everything he does is tainted. We are in a country now where the head of our government, our Prime Minister, is tainted, and that is simply not acceptable to Canadians.

The public of Canada expected the Prime Minister to clear the air and take personal responsibility in Calgary, and he completely failed to do that. The Liberals are providing the Prime Minister with another opportunity to do just that. He should accept that offer in the spirit in which it is extended. It is extended in the spirit of clarifying his role, clarifying his responsibility, clearing the air, and returning a scrap of integrity to the role and the office of the Prime Minister. We encourage him to do that.

•(1640)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what it is with the Liberals and why they so dislike my

family stories about pizza. The vast majority of Canadians enjoy a good pizza every once in a while. They do. I know they do, because the store was very busy. It is only the Liberals who are defending these senators and who, for some reason, do not like pizza.

They want to bring this to the ethics committee. I like the member for Avalon. I think he is a very good guy. I get along with him. I do not always agree with what he talks about. In the ethics committee, he will get one question. I am not sure what that question is going to be, but if he has it ready, that one question he will get at the ethics committee that is such a great question that it will help to clarify everything, I am prepared to let him ask that question right now.

In reality, this is just continuing Liberal nonsense. They want to protect the status quo. They want to get it out of here quickly, because they are actually embarrassed by the fact that they cannot add anything to the debate. They are embarrassed by the fact that the Leader of the Opposition has kind of taken the spotlight away from their leader.

The New Democrats have made this their priority. I might disagree with that, but as their priority, they have been asking questions. The Liberals have been completely absent, and now they are saying that one question in the ethics committee is all they need, and that is the end of it.

I want to hear from the member for Avalon. What is that one question that is so important that he needs to have it at the ethics committee?

The Deputy Speaker: I would point out to the Parliamentary Secretary that it is the Chair who decides who gets to ask questions. The member for Vancouver Quadra currently has the floor, if she wishes to respond to the comments.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is an amazingly bizarre way to take the spotlight away from the Liberal Party leader. He is changing the story, blocking reasonable questions about what occurred in the Prime Minister's Office, and inflaming the mistrust and concern of the public by not telling the truth. What a way to go.

I would also say that the parliamentary secretary, day after day, comes in here and insults the intelligence and concerns of Canadians about the integrity of our parliamentary system by talking about things that have nothing to do with it, as if this were a joke. This is not a joke. This is at the base of the integrity—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I advise all members that when the Chair takes to his feet, the members should resume their seats.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister has a point of order.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if it is parliamentary what the hon. member just said about me. I can respect the fact that she might not necessarily like how I answer questions, but the member disparages my character in saying that I do not care about the Canadian people.

I can say that I was elected by one of the highest margins in the country. More people voted for me than any other—

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•(1645)

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. I do not know if the member for Vancouver Quadra had finished with her response.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I am not sure where I was when this bogus point of order cut me off.

What I was saying was that it is insulting the intelligence and concerns of Canadians, Conservative voters, Conservative Party members, and Conservative caucus members when the Parliamentary Secretary stands up and talks about pizza, when there are real questions that go to the heart of the integrity of our parliamentary system and whether the Prime Minister is telling the truth.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I like the member for Vancouver Quadra. I travelled with her a number of times when she lived in New Westminster. She is okay in my book. We probably did not vote for each other, but I do not know.

What I want to point out is that we, of course, support the motion. We want to get to the bottom of the various Senate scandals on the Conservative side involving Mike Duffy, Patrick Brazeau, and Pamela Wallin. I could go on and on.

However, there is another set of Senate scandals that are Liberal-oriented Senate scandals. I can remember, in the previous Parliament, Andrew Thompson, a Liberal senator who lived in Mexico and came in three days a year to do his Senate work. We had Raymond Lavigne, who is currently serving a sentence. We have Mac Harb, who purposely, to get around the rules on expense claims, bought a house 101 kilometres from Parliament Hill so that he could illegally fleece the taxpayer.

We have had just as many problems from Liberal senators as we have had from Conservative senators. Our position is very clear. We think the place should be abolished. Most Canadians agree with us.

I would like to ask the member for Vancouver Quadra why her party continues to flog this completely undemocratic and illegitimate Senate, when Conservatives and Liberals have proven that the Senate should be abolished? That is in the interest of Canadians.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that this motion is about the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister, not about the Senate. It is the Prime Minister's Office that is implicated in potential bribery, corruption, cover-up, and silencing of a member of the red chamber, and that is why we need some honest answers and a clearing of the air by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, what really resonated with me after what the member for Vancouver Quadra said is the issue of personal accountability.

Like her, I am a small business person. If I do well, I love to take the credit and reap the benefits and profits, but if I screw up and make mistakes, or even if my staff make mistakes because I provided inadequate management, it is not appropriate and really not professional to try to shift the blame to my employees or others. That resonates with me.

I would like to reread a line that I quoted earlier today, something the Prime Minister said in 1996. He stated, "Many of Canada's problems stem from a winner-take-all style of politics..." I would like

to personally end that quote by adding "where we are always right, they are always wrong, in the mindless tribalism that happens on all sides of the House".

When we get past this horrible mess that is interfering with the function of Parliament, I hope that we deal appropriately with the procedures of the House to make it more democratic, more balanced, more fair, and more effective.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North for his deep commitment to democracy and for respectful parliamentary procedures. His comment is in line with that.

Personal accountability, as he pointed out, is critical for the private sector, and in this place ministerial accountability is very much part of that tradition. Ministers take responsibility for problems that happen in their ministries. They step down or step aside—or it used to happen, that is, until the current Conservative government, led by a Prime Minister who is demonstrating a whole other type of lack of ethics in behaviour.

I would like to add to the description that the member just provided. The current government has a principle that the end justifies the means, and that is what has gotten the Prime Minister into trouble. That leads to a downward spiral in terms of democracy. We are to be a model in the world for democracy, yet what is happening is the demeaning and degrading of the very underpinning and principles of our democracy in Canada.

That has to change, and we are going to give the Prime Minister an opportunity to start that change with this motion.

•(1650)

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what troubles me as a parliamentarian spending my first year in the House is that my friends in the NDP and the Liberal Party like to ask a lot of questions, but they do not tend to listen to the responses, nor do they really care about the responses. It is the same for the independent member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

There has been much talk of contrition. I would remind all colleagues in the House that back in May, in Lima, Peru, the Prime Minister addressed this aspect clearly. He stated:

...I am very sorry that this has occurred. I am not only sorry, I've been through the range of emotions. I'm sorry, I'm frustrated, I'm extremely angry...

Leadership is not just looking back at those frustrations and emotions; it is about going forward and ensuring that these types of abuses to the public trust do not happen again, which is why we are committed to reforming the Senate.

I would ask the member for Vancouver Quadra to get behind that and I would ask why the leader of her party is encouraging the status quo in the Senate.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, in fact Liberals are for Senate reform as well.

I would like to say in response that it is not good enough to do a Mayor Ford-like apology that says, “I’m sorry”, and when asked what he is sorry for, he says, “I’m sorry. Let’s move forward.”

For the Prime Minister to go to Peru and say, “I’m angry. Let’s move forward” is not an acceptance of personal responsibility and is not being accountable. There certainly has not been honesty from the Prime Minister, and that is what he has an opportunity to correct.

* * *

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY ACT

BILL C-7—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the third reading stage of Bill C-7, an act to amend the Museums Act in order to establish the Canadian museum of history 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 and disposal of the proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—INSTRUCTION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow night, a short time from now, there will be a bit of a watershed moment in the House. Members from both sides will take a decision. They will vote according to their own conscience as to whether or not accountability will indeed reign in the House.

The House will decide whether or not members from various parties, but most importantly individual members, will do what they felt they came here to do.

This will be a watershed moment because when I look back and remember some of the statements that were brought forward by members who represented the Canadian Alliance party, the Reform Party, and then the merger that formed the Conservative Party of Canada, they came forward with very strong ideals that they voiced with passion. They said they would clean up Ottawa. They said they would bring in a Parliamentary Budget Officer with teeth to prevent the kind of shenanigans that they said were going on around here. They said they would empower officers of Parliament to ensure that those agents of Parliament could perform their functions and do their jobs.

It has not quite worked out that way. A lot of good people, very well-intentioned and strong-minded and very vocal and articulate in their opinions, said they were coming here to do their constituents' business, and one of key points of their constituents' business was to clean up Ottawa. No more of these cover-ups, no more sweeping

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things under the rug. They were the Conservative Party, and they were going to set the record straight.

History has not been quite that kind in terms of their performance. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was someone who just got in the way. Conservatives were trying to do the people's business, and that pesky Parliamentary Budget Officer was getting in the way.

The nuclear regulatory commissioner was going on about people's safety from radiation. Well, she had to shut up; they were going to get rid of her pretty fast, and they did.

The list goes on and on. The Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, the person appointed by the Prime Minister of Canada—the current occupant, whose job it was to ensure the integrity of the public service—was found to be guilty of serious abuse and wrongdoing. The Auditor General of Canada did an investigation and put forward in detail some of his findings.

What did the government and the majority of the Conservative members on that side of the House do? They ensured that the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner was not available to appear before the public accounts committee and that no ministers were prepared to appear before the committee.

That is one of the most important committees of the House. It is an oversight body that reviews the actions of the government. It was a cover-up.

How far we have come. How far the Conservatives have come, because they have now become the problem, the very thing they came here to criticize and be a solution to.

It goes pretty deep, because there has not been any instance that I can recall in my 18 years in this place in which a prime minister himself has been personally implicated in a matter of this seriousness.

Let us review the facts.

The Prime Minister has always said that the buck stops at the Prime Minister's Office. On May 16 the Prime Minister's Office said:

Mr. Wright will not be resigning. Mr. Wright has the full support of the Prime Minister.

A couple of short days later, another statement was issued:

It is with great regret that I have accepted the resignation of Nigel Wright as my Chief of Staff. I accept that Nigel believed that he was acting in the public interest, but I understand the decision he has taken to resign. I want to thank Nigel for his tremendous contribution to our Government over the last two and a half years.

• (1655)

We know that on June 5, the Prime Minister made another statement in the House:

....it was Mr. Wright who made the decision to take his personal funds and give those to Mr. Duffy so that Mr. Duffy could reimburse the taxpayers. Those were his decisions. They were not communicated to me or to members of my office.

Then, more recently, on October 28, the Prime Minister said:

Look, I think the responsibility whenever things go wrong is for us to take appropriate action. As you know, I had a chief of staff who made an inappropriate payment Mr. Duffy. He was dismissed.

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There is a certain disconnect here that people are aware of. There is an incredible disconnect between the truth of what the Prime Minister said initially versus what he says now versus what he said about how many people in his office knew about what went on versus what he says now about how many people in his office knew.

For such an orchestrated event to occur, behind closed doors, among such senior members of his staff, and for such senior members of the party to be complicit in it, and for him not to know, I think the Prime Minister himself recognizes, would bring his own managerial competence into question.

That is the stuff of debate and politics and is eventually for the voters to decide. What is not for any of us to decide is a version of the truth. It is for openness and accountability to occur to allow that light to pour in on the truth.

This party that governs now once actually made a commitment to one of its predecessor parties that cabinet ministers would be required to attend every session of every parliamentary committee, every hearing, on which they had an interest and a responsibility to report.

It was not a question of whether a parliamentary committee could grab a minister for an hour to answer questions on a particular topic. The point of view of that party, put in a platform document, was that cabinet ministers would be required to attend every session of every committee meeting.

Now we have an opportunity to show accountability to Parliament through the committee process. How far we have come.

The text of the motion is as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

It is pretty straightforward. It is part of the process of accountability. It shows that we have an understanding of and an appreciation for the committee structure. Often it is the standing committees of the House that allow us to access or glean information that may not necessarily be available in the cut and thrust of question period. However, the questions and answers that flow in question period will be part of any such study by a standing committee. It will provide the basis for some of those questions that as yet are unanswered.

The crux of this motion is very simple. The Conservative Party of Canada has been communicating not to Canadians. It is more interested in communicating with what it calls its base. Allow me to communicate to the Conservative Party base for a minute.

I do not believe for one second that a Conservative Party donor, someone who truly believed that he or she was supporting a party that was going to do things differently, was supporting a party that would recklessly fire a quasi-judicial regulator of nuclear waste and energy as payback for speaking out. I do not think the Conservative Party base was interested in making sure that the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner was given carte blanche to run roughshod over her office and never be held accountable on the floor of the House or at the public accounts committee or anywhere else.

● (1700)

I do not believe the Conservative Party base members ever thought that when they were giving their \$20, \$200 or \$1,100 cheques to the party that those funds would be used for legal fees for someone whom the Prime Minister had suspicions about, according to his own words. I do not believe they thought the Prime Minister of Canada would allow Mr. Nigel Wright, whom he later implied was distrustful and incompetent, into his inner sanctum.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: He never said that.

Mr. Gerry Byrne: He certainly implied it. No, there is a better word. I have just been prompted by members opposite. I apologize; I did not get it right. What the Prime Minister did say was that Nigel Wright was deceptive. That is what he said.

For a guy who is involved in securities exchange and equity offerings, the last thing he would want to be called is deceptive. Serious, irreparable harm has been done to Mr. Wright. The Conservatives, and the Prime Minister of Canada in particular as its leader, say it was well deserved. I submit it would be valuable for the Prime Minister to explain why someone who had his full and utter confidence as his chief of staff is now being called deceptive.

Remember, the three most powerful people in the political fiefdom of Ottawa, many would argue, would be the prime minister, followed by the clerk of the Privy Council; and the third most powerful person, the person exposed to most secrets, incredibly important information, and given a top secret clearance as a result, would be the prime minister's chief of staff. Whatever the Clerk of the Privy Council knows and wants to transmit or convey to the prime minister of Canada, the chief of staff to the prime minister also knows. Now that person is being called deceptive. That is a lot of information to have in the head of someone whom the Prime Minister is now calling deceptive.

The security commissioner who was arrested in Panama, a person providing oversight to the operations of our security establishment, was another appointee by the Prime Minister. Mr. Porter has presumably been exposed to some of the most important secrets and sensitive information that anyone could imagine, not only for Canada's security but for each and every one of our allies. The Prime Minister appointed him, but that is not really consequential because he has been dealt with. Let us leave it at that. Let us move forward.

That whole narrative is just not working anymore. It is not working with Parliament. It is not working with the Canadian public. In fact, the truth is that—however regrettable this may be to the Prime Minister—it is not working with the Conservative base anymore. Quite frankly, I do not think they ever signed up to be members of the Conservative Party—most of them anyway—to be simple props for the Prime Minister's bidding.

“It’s terrible when those guys do that; but when we do it, it’s okay” is not really a good slogan. It is not really a good slogan for the Conservative Party of Canada and its members. Through my own knowledge and understanding of very good people who are members of the Conservative Party of Canada, I know they are concerned about the actions of the Prime Minister and they have asked for clarity. In actual fact, the base itself is saying that, if it is so onerous to be held to the truth under a situation where one is expected to tell the truth—a standing committee of the House of Commons where proceedings are held under oath with a presumption that one will tell the truth or face a perjury charge—it means one is not telling something and there are other things one wants to ensure are not told.

● (1705)

This is not a small matter. It directly affects the Prime Minister of Canada, his office, its operations and its capacity to deal with not only mundane issues but sensitive top-secret issues related to the safety and security of Canada and its allies.

I have presented to the House a small sampling of circumstances where the Prime Minister’s judgment has been shown to be a little off, and the consequence has hurt each and every one of us. It has hurt our ability to stay safe. It has hurt our ability to work well with our allies. It has hurt our ability to have trust and faith in our institutions.

If that is not important enough to take three hours of someone’s day to appear before an existing standing committee of the House of Commons that is charged with what the Conservative Party of Canada suggested it came to Ottawa for to begin with—which was ethics—well, maybe someone’s ethical and moral compass is being influenced by magnets outside of the compass; maybe someone has to take a break and ask where we are going with all of this.

If the objective of the strategy is to just simply prolong this until some other matter comes up to distract and take away the attention, then that is not leadership; it is management. If the Conservatives are just going to manage this affair instead of leading it, then they should make way for others to become leaders of our country; make way so that someone who is actually ready and able to lead this country can assume that job.

Right now, we have a solid demonstration of crisis management, which is showing serious cracks, unfortunately for the Conservatives. The cracks are showing because the Prime Minister is changing his story just about every time he stands on his feet. It appears that he is taking his cues from what might be being found out from the RCMP investigation or the auditor reports; or maybe he is thumbing through some other senators’ expense reports, or whatever. I do not know what it is, but we all find it very strange that a man who says “never apologize, never surrender”, is now all of a sudden changing his story.

A man who had such great respect and support of the Prime Minister has been labelled as deceitful. That is a label that will stick with Nigel Wright for a very long time. I have a feeling that, based on what has been described to me by others about Mr. Wright’s character, he will not fink out the Prime Minister, but when he is asked very specific questions by those in authority, I think he will

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give very straightforward answers. That is what has been described to me. Maybe that is what the Prime Minister fears the most.

The government could simply show a little leadership instead of saying, “Oh well, what about the great railway scandal of 1874?” or whatever, and “Until we solve that issue then I guess we can’t get to this issue, can we?”

Leadership is dealing with it when we have a problem, a legitimate problem, showing some credibility and fostering an element of trust with all Canadians. However, if a question is answered with, “Oh well, your shoes are black and you should have polished them, and you didn’t; therefore you’re just as big a problem”, then we are never going to get to the bottom of this.

If that is the strategy, let us fling muck to the point where everyone is filthy. We will not have to worry about Senate reform; it will be parliamentary reform that we are really going to have to start talking about, because we are showing that this House does not work.

● (1710)

It is a very straightforward motion, a watershed moment for each and every one of us. Can we use the institutions of the House of Commons that already exist to examine a problem that all of us acknowledge exists as well?

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

● (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until Wednesday, November 6, at the end of government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the division stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders.

The hon. Chief Government Whip.

Private Members' Business

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I think if you seek it you shall find consent to see the clock at 5:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

RETIREMENT INCOME BILL OF RIGHTS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.) moved that Bill C-513, an act to promote and strengthen the Canadian retirement income system, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to discuss an issue that I think is critically important to Canadians and one that I have been involved in for some time, especially as the critic for seniors, pensions and the status of women, which I had previously held. I had an opportunity to talk to countless Canadians.

People who are seniors today talked to me about their struggles and how difficult it was to make ends meet. I talked to people who were in their fifties who said they don't have any ability to save money. It's not that they don't have it, but they don't have anywhere to put it. They don't work for a company that has a pension plan, so they put some into RRSPs but in many cases that's not a pension plan either. Unless they choose to work for the government or some of our major employers that provide a pension plan to which they as well as the employer can contribute, many Canadians are simply out of luck and do not have that opportunity.

Another part of this whole equation and discussion is the issue of the impact on many small companies that have a responsibility and would like to have a pension plan for their employees, but it is far too expensive. They are small companies that are trying to ensure they are able to employ people. We clearly do not want to have an impact on their businesses and deter them from being successful.

I heard that from all different equations. I heard it from the middle-aged.

I did not hear anything from the young folks who are in their thirties because they really think that the government is going to take care of them. When I would say to them, "When you think the government's going to take of you, that means you may be living on \$1,500, \$1,600, maybe \$2,000, if you are really lucky", they were quite taken aback. They thought that the government had a pension for them. We have old age security and our Canada pension plan. They thought it would be enough. It is not enough.

I think part of our role as government, as parliamentarians, is to ensure that people understand that we cannot sit back and wait for government to take care of us. We have to be establishing a plan. We have to be contributing. It is very difficult for those in a low-income bracket.

However, we have a guaranteed income supplement that was brought in by a Liberal government, as was the old age security, as was the Canada pension plan. However, this is not about partisan politics tonight. This is about trying to move forward to recognize the challenges that are facing Canadians and to help them start to plan.

Financial literacy is a big issue that we will hear more about as I go on with this speech. Canadians are being affected all the time because they have not spent enough time learning what pensions are and why it is important to contribute, as well as finding the opportunities to contribute. That is a major concern.

When I introduced the bill in our last Parliament, it had the support of all political parties in the House. I want to thank the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, in particular, and the member for Macleod, both of whom set aside partisan differences and supported the bill because it was the right thing to do.

While the bill was lost when the election was called, I am hopeful that the MPs in this Parliament will use the same sense of this not being about partisan politics or knocking anyone. It is about trying to think of a future and what we can do to make a difference in the lives of many people.

For clarity, Bill C-513 is exactly the same as Bill C-574. Not one word has changed.

However, I would like to be clear. I am not asking members' support for the sake of an ego or anything else. I am asking for your support so people such as Ray and Dawn-Marie Brown can get the help they need.

For those who did not happen to read Saturday's *Financial Post*, I would urge them to take a look at the Barbara Shecter story. It is just one small example of some of the challenges that are facing Canadians today. The story tells of how Ray and Dawn-Marie Brown tried to put money away for retirement, but because of financial illiteracy and financial counsel that was not truly in their best interests, which has to stop, they now have the major problem of dealing with a huge debt they took on thinking it was going to help them in their retirement.

• (1720)

Canadians are urged to put their money away for retirement if they have some, but investing is not as intuitive as the industry rhetoric might indicate and good advice is hard to find. The Browns thought they had good advice. It came from a reputable firm. However, \$200,000 later, for them it was clearly not good advice.

Worse yet, anyone who is studying the issue of pension reform knows that individuals in a defined benefit pension arrangement accumulate five to seven times more retirement income than those who are not. Put another way, those who have the opportunity to save effectively for retirement have much more gold in their golden years. We as parliamentarians have been very fortunate to be part of a defined benefit plan. However, fewer and fewer people in this country have that opportunity. This should not be about bringing people down to the bottom level. Rather, it should be about how we can increase and provide opportunities for more Canadians to have access to a good pension plan. That is exactly why Bill C-513 is so important.

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Traditionally, defined benefit plans are available only to public sector workers and a small minority of private sector workers. That means only those working for large companies or the government have access to this type of retirement plan. Everyone else is forced to go it alone in the markets and face the challenge, as Ray and Dawn-Marie did when they were trying to find a proper investment counsellor to help them invest for their coming 20 or 30 years. That is wrong and Bill C-513 is intended to be the first step toward correcting that inequity.

In a country like Canada, it is unacceptable that senior citizens would be subjected to poverty and squalor during their retirement years. It falls upon all of us as parliamentarians to do what we can to provide opportunities for people to save their money for their retirement years. If Canadians are to take a more active role in retirement planning, then governments must also be prepared to step up and do their share. Private and public retirement saving options must be explored and integrated more effectively with one another. We know that systems, such as the guaranteed income supplement, the Canadian pension plan and the Old Age Security Act are important, but they are only elements of a much larger strategy. That is again where Bill C-513 comes into play.

The legislation is the first of its kind proposed to ensure that our future seniors have better nest eggs and the retirement income security that they need. In broad strokes, the bill would create substantive, justiciable rights relating to retirement income, give every person a chance to accumulate retirement income, promote good plan administration, and set out in law the pension reform goals to which we aspire legislatively. This is about establishing goals. This is about a first step. This is not saying that we will increase pensions or increase anything. This is about setting the goals to which Canadians and governments need to aspire to make sure that the vehicles needed for people to be able to save some money are there.

The government has introduced the PPRP plan. We have suggested the supplementary Canada pension plan, and there are other suggestions out there. However, there needs to be a vehicle for Canadians to be able to invest and save in a well-administered and safe plan. Whatever that plan would be is not in the bill. These are the first steps of a bill of rights that would start to establish the goals that I think government should have.

I want to take a moment to underscore that final point because it may be one of the most important. Bill C-513 would set out in law only the goals to which we should aspire legislatively as they relate to retirement income. It would legally compel both the current federal government and future governments to take real action to promote, enhance and preserve retirement income security, coverage and adequacy.

For years, successive governments have set out their plans to help enhance pensions in Canada, but they have done so without any sort of long-term map. Bill C-513 can be that road map.

• (1725)

This bill of rights is for pension income. It recognizes that a strong retirement income system is essential to the well-being of Canadians and to the overall health of our economy. It recognizes that the Canadian retirement income system is built on a

combination of personal, public and private options. It affirms that we have the right to a retirement income system that promotes adequacy, transparency, affordability and equity. It also enshrines these principles in law, while respecting Parliament's constitutional limitations.

To me, and to the hundreds of pensioners with whom I have consulted, pension reform is as fundamental as motherhood. Canadian seniors, particularly the 300,000 who now live below the poverty line, are tired of struggling to make ends meet. They do not want their families and kids to have to do the same thing. Seniors should not be forced to decide between medicine and food or shelter and heat. Unfortunately, we do have certain seniors who for various reasons are in that situation. I do not think any of us want to see that continue. After all, today's seniors are yesterday's labour force, yesterday's caregivers and yesterday's builders of the economy.

If we are going to talk about consumers today, we need to remember to look beyond their current spending abilities. They carried this country through wars, depression and countless other times of difficulty, and they did it while working to raise a family and while building the social programs that we so value today. They deserve better than to be relegated to a life of poverty. It is within our power to give them and their children what they deserve.

Compassion, consideration and respect are terms that go hand in glove with retirement income security, coverage and adequacy. Today, we will conclude the second reading debate on Bill C-513 and we will then be asked to make a decision. Are we prepared to stand with our seniors or are we determined to let them stand alone?

Bill C-513 is not part of any single partisan agenda, and I would be more than pleased to share the credit of passing Bill C-513 with all members in the House. The provisions of Bill C-513 already have the endorsement of several groups, such as the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Federation of Pensioners. These groups do not support this effort because they are Liberal. They support it because they, too, believe that the security of the pension promise is paramount.

I have spoken to many members of the House on this subject and I have come to believe that this notion is one that really unites all of us. We have differences on how to arrive at the destination, but the end goal should be the same. Bill C-513 would offer us the freedom to pursue our own legislative paths, so long as the outcome is one that enhances pension security for all.

As I said, I have travelled across the country and I have spoken to many on this subject. Sadly, most are not adequately saving for retirement. This truth clearly requires foresight and leadership on the part of all of us and the government.

Clearly, we have learned that there is a need for a long-term road map for pension reform so that in the next 20 years, when people retire, they have an adequate income. Otherwise, the task falls back to the provincial, municipal and federal governments to provide that aid. This would allow people to survive, but it would not give people a decent level of living. It would still mean that they are living at just the minimum.

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If we could encourage the changes necessary and do everything we can to encourage people to put money away, we would all be better off and our seniors would find more gold in their golden years. However, it will take time to make those changes and it will need people, such as all of us in the House, supporting things such as Bill C-513 to ensure that we are moving forward, thinking about retirement for many Canadians and helping them to achieve their goals.

● (1730)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess my first question to the member would be as follows. She said that the bill would just set goals to which governments should aspire. I think those were her words.

How exactly would the bill legally compel any change of government behaviour? Where are the justiciable standards that would create a better nest egg for people in their golden years?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, if we talk to people today about saving their money, they will tell us that there are PRPPs, RRSPs and a few things like that, but there are very few plans that are a road map to help people to achieve the goal that a defined benefit does for those of us in Parliament. There is even a DC plan for people who work in other companies that are not as quite as affluent as the government when it comes to investing in pensions.

We have to start establishing some benchmarks of what people need to have and we need to help them get there. If they are able to save a few dollars, where would they put it? In RRSPs? They end up taking that out. That is not a given plan.

I am not setting down what the plans have to be. We are suggesting in C-513 that there needs to be a plan as we move forward into the future. Otherwise, much of the responsibilities for seniors as they get older will fall back on provincial government as well as put pressure on our federal budgets.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I applaud the member for York West for her general approach in dealing with the seniors and the pensions issue. She has been a very strong advocate.

Her opposition to increasing the retirement age from 65 to 67 and her commitment to bringing forward the important stability of programs, such as our guaranteed annual income, CPP and pension programs in general, should be commended. She should be commended for the advocacy role she has played in protecting the financial interests of our seniors.

I ask her if she would provide some further comment. When she talks about retirement goals, does she see all of those different forms of pension programs being incorporated into it in some fashion and to what degree?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his continued great work in the House, representing Winnipeg North and working for all of us.

We talk about a bill of rights. We were to have an airline bill of rights. In fact, my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador introduced an airline bill of rights. It did not cost a whole lot of money, but it was a bill of rights that would have established certain activity, procedures or rights to how passengers should be treated.

This bill outlines how we should treat seniors in Canada, which means we need to put down in legislative form that we will be keep retirement and financial literacy as an important part as we go through the process.

It is up to the federal government to show the leadership that says retirement income is important, the protection of that income is important, ensuring that Canadians are literate on the issue of financial literacy so they fully understand what they need to do to better protect themselves and move forward in the future.

● (1735)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have time for a quick question.

The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is reminiscent of the grasshopper and the ant. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party is made up of a bunch of grasshoppers who want to make sure the ant's stockpiles are at their disposal.

I would like someone to explain how they can be talking about helping people avoid poverty without necessarily talking about how much money will be put in the pension fund, who will put it there and when it will happen.

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, we talk about money and budgets all the time. The bill does not talk about how much money needs to be saved. It talks about providing the opportunity for people to become financially knowledgeable about pensions and about where they should invest.

The bill is about the government using this bill of rights in the future as a road map to say that it has a responsibility to ensure Canadians are financially literate. They understand that they have to save money for their future, whether it is a small amount or not.

At the moment people are just sail along, unless they work for a company that provides a pension, thinking they will live on OAS and the rest of it. If we want to help Canadians be better prepared for the future, then we need a road map, and that is what Bill C-513 would do. It calls on the government, whatever government is in play, and hopefully it will be ours the next time around, to devise a road map to help Canadians move forward.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely pleased to have this opportunity to rise in the House to talk about private member's Bill C-513.

First, our government is committed to standing up for seniors. We do not just talk, we act. We established October 1 as National Seniors Day so people across Canada could pay tribute to the seniors who helped build our country and continue to help make Canada great. We have also taken action to combat social isolation of seniors because we want to ensure they continue to be active members of our communities.

We understand that Canadian seniors have a tremendous diversity of skills and experiences that serve as a benefit to the Canadian economy and we want to give them the opportunity to share their skills and experiences with other Canadians. That is why our government is funding over 1,750 community projects across Canada for seniors.

For example, through the new horizons for seniors program, the Maple Pioneer Italian Seniors Club in Vaughan, Ontario, is receiving \$25,000 to purchase a computer, provide lessons and organize outings for over 600 local seniors.

Another aspect of our commitment to seniors is ensuring that they are protected from abuse. This is very important. In Canada, it has been estimated that between 4% and 10% of seniors experience some form of abuse. We know elder abuse is a hidden crime. Cases are vastly under-reported. This crime can take many forms, including physical, financial or emotional. That is why our government passed the Protecting Canada's Seniors Act so that those who committed these terrible crimes would receive stronger penalties.

We are also funding initiatives that help protect seniors against elder abuse. For example, through the new horizons for seniors program, the Punjabi Community Health Services in Mississauga, Ontario, will receive \$25,000 in funding for a project where people can learn about various forms of elder abuse. Their discussions and stories will be documented in an educational video that will help raise awareness in the community. This project has been very well received. For instance, Baldev Mutta, chief executive officer of the Punjabi Community Health Services, stated:

Punjabi Community Health Services is excited about the funding we have received. We will be developing a video...to educate South Asian seniors on senior abuse. The seniors are very excited to participate in the project and are getting ready with the script, acting and composition of the story.

That is good news. We are not only protecting seniors from abuse, but we are also protecting the hard-earned money in their wallets. Since 2006, our government has introduced over \$2.7 billion in targeted tax relief to both seniors and pensioners. For example, we increased the age credit by \$1,000 in 2006 and by another \$1,000 in 2009. We doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit to \$2,000. We introduced pension income splitting and increased the age limits for maturing pensions and RRSPs to 71 from 61 years of age. These are just a few of the steps we have taken to benefit seniors.

We also have cut the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. When the recent recession struck the global economy, our government took decisive action. We have ensured that the Canadian economy has remained strong, while many other countries have not. We are very proud of our record. We know and seniors know that we made the right choices for Canadian families, businesses and communities. We have

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managed debt, we have tackled spending, we have kept taxes low and all Canadians are benefiting.

Our strong economic management has helped create one million net new jobs since the end of the recession. Of course, we are now an international leader in job creation, leading the G7. In fact, just recently the Prime Minister announced the historic Canada-European Union trade agreement. The trade agreement will create even more jobs and bring greater prosperity to Canadians.

• (1740)

We have been demonstrating responsible fiscal management because we know it ensures the sustainability of public services and lower tax rates for future generations.

Canadians gave us this mandate and we are delivering. Just recently Dan Kelly, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said:

It is clear the Federal Government is listening carefully to the needs of Canadian entrepreneurs by announcing plans to...reduce taxes on small businesses and address the burden of red tape they shoulder.

Indeed, he is correct. We continue to safeguard the Canadian economy. An important part of safeguarding the economy of Canada is ensuring that Canada's retirement income system remains strong. We have done exactly that. Canada's retirement income system is recognized internationally. It is a model that succeeds in reducing poverty among seniors and in providing high levels of retirement income.

This model is based on a three pillar approach.

The first pillar is made up of the old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits, which provide a minimum income guarantee for seniors.

The second pillar is the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan. Both plans provide a defined benefit in retirement based on an individual's career earnings. Both plans also provide additional benefits, such as disability benefits and survivor benefits.

The third pillar includes tax-assisted private savings opportunities to help Canadians to accumulate additional savings for retirement. This includes registered pension plans and registered retirement savings plans.

In addition, we introduced the highly successful tax-free savings account. I am pleased to report that just a few years after we introduced it, the TFSA is benefiting more than eight million Canadians. They are benefiting from a flexible, tax-assisted savings account that may also be used for retirement savings purposes.

As I have said, Canada's system has been highly effective, but that has not stopped us from taking action to improve it.

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In 2012, we demonstrated leadership in this area by passing the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act that will provide employers, employees and self-employed with a low-cost pension option. This will enable more workers to benefit from the lower costs that result in a large pooled pension plan. This is another tangible example of concrete action that we have taken that will benefit millions of seniors.

This is where our government and the Liberal Party differ. While we take concrete action, the Liberals make empty proposals. While we take positive action to benefit Canadians, the Liberals put forward hollow bills in a cynical attempt to win votes.

Bill C-513 is simply a gimmick, a sham. The bill would apply to less than 10% of pension plans in Canada, and the Liberals know it. It also unnecessarily duplicates existing pieces in federal pension legislation.

Simply put, the private member's bill sponsored by the member for York West is not in the best interests of Canadian seniors and for that reason we oppose it. What we do support are policies that actually benefit seniors.

Unfortunately, I am not surprised that this empty bill has come from the Liberal Party. After all, the Liberal leader himself fails to provide any serious policy. He seems more concerned about his drug smoking policy.

While our government listens to Canadians who want a better job and a brighter future, the Liberals listen to pot smokers who want a bigger joint and a better reefer. Canadians know better. We take the pension system very seriously. We take the economy seriously. We will continue to ensure greater financial security for seniors and prosperity for all Canadians.

• (1745)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-513, the so-called retirement income bill of rights. As I will describe in greater detail later, I have very serious reservations about supporting the bill even at this stage, but on balance, I believe that it is more important that the bill be sent to committee for careful scrutiny than it is to vote against the bill at this time.

The stated goal, as the member for York West noted, is to enshrine in law the notion that all Canadians have the right to contribute to a decent retirement plan. Unfortunately, this Liberal bill contains some very vague declarations and half measures, which we will not oppose, but does very little to actually improve the retirement security of Canadians. I will discuss the actual contents of the bill later.

In the meantime, let me talk about what the bill is not about.

Canadians are not saving enough for their retirement. No one disagrees with that statement. I am particularly worried about the younger members of our workforce.

Last January, the Prime Minister announced that he would increase the eligibility age for old age security, effectively raising the Canadian retirement age from 65 to 67. New Democrats have committed to reversing those changes, and expert bodies such as the OECD and the Parliamentary Budget Officer agree that this dramatic

change was not necessary. The old age security system as it was is entirely sustainable.

By 2030, Conservative cuts to the OAS will slash \$11 billion in retirement income from seniors as they raise the retirement age to 67. That amounts to \$13,000 in retirement savings out of the pockets of every Canadian senior. Combined with cuts made by the previous Liberal administrations, cuts to both CPP, the Quebec pension plan, and OAS will take \$26 billion in retirement income away from Canadians.

Retirement security is one of the most pressing economic issues facing Canadian families today. As many as 5.8 million Canadians, nearly a third of our workforce, are facing a steep decline in their standard of living once they retire.

The simple truth is this: a great number of Canadians are simply not saving enough. As a result, provincial governments, the Canadian Labour Congress, Canada's largest retirement group—CARP—and various financial experts have all been calling on the federal government to move forward with plans to increase the Canada pension plan.

The chief executive officer of the CIBC, Mr. Gerald McCaughey, has also been speaking out about the need to improve our public pensions, and the former chief actuary of the Canada pension plan, Mr. Bernard Dussault, supports doubling the CPP. We hope the Liberals do the right thing and get on board. So far they have opposed expanding the CPP, even though provinces, experts, unions, and CARP have all been on side.

Provincial finance ministers have indicated strong support for an increase to the CPP, yet in June, the Minister of Finance failed in his commitment to meet with provincial and territorial finance ministers to get going on this job. When will the Conservatives stop standing in the way of the reforms that so many take for granted as necessary and indeed vital?

Let me turn to this bill.

The title, “retirement income bill of rights”, is very misleading. The bill only addresses certain features of the retirement income system. It purports, as the member said, to promote certain goals, such as adequacy, transparency, affordability, and so forth, but it is entirely unclear how those goals would be achieved.

To call it a bill of rights is misleading in the extreme. What does it mean? As a lawyer, I must point out that this is no Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It has no constitutional force. It has no way to render an inconsistent regulation or bill of no force and effect, as the charter can do under our Constitution, so it is rhetoric. To call it a bill of rights, or in French, *une déclaration des droits*, is misleading in the extreme. It is empty rhetoric.

If it is enacted, it is just going to be another statute. It might have some interpretive force, but for reasons I will describe, it is hard to believe it will have any real impact.

The bill is also very badly drafted. Sometimes it says “every individual has the right...”, and then it says “every individual must have the right...”. In French it only says, *tout individu a le droit*. Why are there differences in drafting? It is of no particular force and effect. Lawyers are going to have a field day with the bill as it is currently drafted.

• (1750)

A couple of the sections are entirely superfluous. It says it applies to Canadian legislative authority, the legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada. Obviously that is the case. Why put a section in? There really are only nine substantive clauses in this bill.

Let me turn to the first of them. Clause 4 says, in part, “Every individual has the right to accumulate sufficient pension income...to provide for a lifestyle in retirement that the individual considers adequate...”. What does that mean? It is an entirely subjective standard. If I believe I have a right to a Rolls Royce pension in my retirement, what does this bill say about that? It is my belief that counts, it seems to say. Moreover, clause 4 of the bill goes on to say that even that right is “subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by a federal law”, except those restrictions cannot be based on “[...] personal characteristic[s]...as age, sex, national origin or occupation”. Most of those things are already covered, and have long been covered, by the Canadian Human Rights Act, so they would make no difference and would change nothing.

As for the “occupation”, I have a lot of trouble understanding what that would mean. Is it not obvious that one's occupation will determine in part the extent of one's retirement income? Is that not a reasonable restriction? If one person is a CEO and another person is a cashier, are not their respective occupations reasonable restrictions on their retirement income? According to this bill, as I read it, that would not be the case, and so I do not know what it means.

Clause 5 discusses how an individual can “...determine how and when to accumulate pension income...”. It goes on to say, “...except that an individual who participates in a workplace plan may be required by that plan to save for retirement”. How would that change the status quo? Would it simply prohibit an employer from forbidding workplace pension plans? If so, it may be of very little value indeed.

Clause 7 would require retirement income plans to provide a “full, accurate and timely disclosure of...[all] material risks...”. Presumably, if consumer protection legislation to that effect does not already exist, that may be of some value.

Clause 8 would codify common law. All it says is that those providing investment advice could not have a conflict of interest. I assure members that is pretty well standard in the industry. It is hard to believe that would add any value.

The bill goes on to say a number of things about training and financial literacy that are all very useful, I suppose. However, greater clarity would be achieved if the laws the bill refers to were actually amended themselves, rather than putting pious statements in this other bill.

This bill contains very little of substance that would address why Canadians are struggling to save for their retirement. Portions of the bill refer to transparency of plans and access to information. That

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would certainly be helpful, but it is regrettable that the bill is mostly made up of grandiose proclamations of retirement rights, which would do very little to change real people's lives.

New Democrats are committed to addressing retirement security needs of Canadians. We have made strong commitments to strengthen our pension plan system and to ensure that Canadians have a secure retirement. This bill would do nothing to change those fundamental issues. It also fails to include any reversal of the Conservatives' retrograde changes to the old age security and guaranteed income system, which will leave seniors more vulnerable at the time of their greatest needs.

In conclusion, I hope that by introducing this bill the Liberals are not demonstrating that they think window dressing is sufficient to address an issue that affects the future retirement security of Canadians. New Democrats are proposing real solutions, such as increasing the CPP and reinstating 65 as the age for accessing old age security. We will support this bill and hope we can strengthen it at the committee stage.

• (1755)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in support of the bill put forward by my colleague. I would to take this opportunity as well to correct some of the misstatements by the NDP and Conservatives on this matter.

I think my NDP colleague does not really understand the limitations of a private member's bill. What this would do is set out in law the legal framework, the bill of rights. It would also address issues of financial knowledge and literacy. However, he seems to imply that this means it is the only Liberal policy. That is far from the truth. A private member's bill, he should know, does not allow expenditure of funds. The Liberals have very concrete proposals outside the scope of this law that do involve funding and which would improve the pension situation of Canadians.

As for the Conservatives, it was amazing listening to that speech. It was eight minutes of boasting about previous Conservative measures with virtually nothing about pensions at all, except a litany of what the Conservatives had done, but nothing whatsoever about the problems and challenges of the future facing Canadians as the population ages.

Let me just remind the House of some of the problems that the Conservatives have failed to address. Then I would like to speak about some of the Liberal proposals, which my NDP colleague has studiously avoided.

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Members may not know that 75% of Canadians working in the private sector do not have access to any pension plan, except those provided to all of us by the Canadian pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. These three provide a maximum income of some \$27,000 per year, although the great majority of people receive significantly less. Experts tell us that Canadians in the private sector earning between \$30,000 and \$100,000 who plan to retire in 20 years will not have enough retirement income to cover necessary living expenses. Those are enough statistics to give us the idea that we have a problem. We have a challenge in our country about our future pensions, a challenge that the Conservatives studiously ignore.

Let me now come to proposals for dealing with this problem.

First, a Liberal government would certainly repeal the idea of increasing the age for the old age security from 65 to 67. Contrary to what the government says, the chief actuary and other experts say that the current system is indeed sustainable. There is no need to move in this direction.

Second, even if we wanted to save money, this is the most heartless, cruel way to do it. By raising the age from 65 to 67, we deprive people who may have had hard-working physical labour and cannot work longer of not only old age security but also of GIS. It hits hardest the weakest and most vulnerable members of Canadian society and will throw them onto provincial welfare.

If the government did have to save money, and we do not believe it does, a better more humane way would be to reduce the maximum income level at which one collects OAS from something over \$100,000, which it is today, to a lower figure. That would be a better, more humane way to do it than raising the retirement age. However, our view is we do not have to do either because the system is sustainable.

That is the first action by the Conservatives on pensions, which is completely negative, retrograde and will hit the most vulnerable.

The second is their pooled retirement plans, which the Conservatives have introduced with great fanfare, but which are really nothing more than a glorified registered retirement savings plan. The take-up by provinces has been minimal. The guarantees against excessive charges by the private sector are non-existent. The inadequacy of these proposals are such that provinces have been led to propose increases to the CPP to the point where I believe two provinces, Ontario and British Columbia, have said that if the government will not go ahead with the CPP enhancement, they will make their own provincial pension plans.

● (1800)

That, as experts tell us, is distinctly a second-best solution compared with an increase in the national plan, but they are so frustrated and aware of the challenges, which the federal government fails to address, that they are going to go this route on their own should sufficient numbers of provinces and the federal government not agree to go with the Canada pension plan.

In order to deal with this issue of inadequate pensions, the Liberal Party previously proposed a supplementary Canada pension plan. It would be a voluntary plan involving auto-enrolment so that a high proportion of individuals would likely participate. Since the last

election, we have evidence from the U.K., which has introduced a similar plan with good enrolment and with minimal cost. In other words, this could be a good solution to our future pension challenges.

One major advantage it would have over the government's pooled plan is cost. This would be a government plan with costs equivalent to the Canada pension plan, significantly less than one percentage point per year, compared with private sector plans, which are one, two or even three percentage points per year, a much higher cost.

As experts have shown us, a fairly small difference in those costs, between say 1% and 2.5%, can cause a reduction in one's pension in the order of 25% to 30% because of the power of compound interest. As I have said previously, let a thousand flowers bloom. Let the supplementary Canada pension plan proceed to provide competition with the private sector. Let it put forward its best products and let the consumer decide whether to go with the private sector or the supplementary Canada pension plan. I think that would provide more choice and better options for Canadians to deal with their retirement challenges in the future.

Finally, we are also very interested in the proposals currently being put forward by Prince Edward Island, and supported by Ontario, to expand the Canada pension plan, if only because the government's actions are so totally inadequate. Some reaction is necessary, whether it is a supplementary Canada pension plan, as we propose, or a moderate expansion of the existing Canada pension plan put forward by a number of provinces. As I said, certain provinces are even prepared to have their own provincial pension plans should this one not materialize.

Both an expanded CPP and our previous proposal for a supplementary CPP have the advantage of low cost, 1% or less per year, and that, compared with the private sector alternative favoured by the government, would produce materially better pensions in the future for Canadians.

In summary, I believe that my colleague's bill is a good bill. I think it provides a legal framework setting out Canadians' rights, a bill of rights. It also deals effectively with the financial literacy issue.

It is not a panacea, as my colleague would be the first to admit. Private members' bills cannot spend money, just as the NDP's bill on housing strategy does not have any money either. That is not the function of private members' bills.

However, when the member's bill is combined with other proposals, first of all, not to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67, and also to go with either a supplementary CPP or a moderate expansion of the existing CPP, then the bill, in combination with those actions, would provide a groundwork or a good start in dealing with the pressing pension needs of Canadians.

Contrast that with the Conservative speech, which did not even acknowledge future problems, let alone make proposals on how to deal with this problem. Contrast that with the NDP speech, which, while that member supported our bill, seemed to have a false or inflated idea of the eligible or permitted scope of private members' bills in general.

When we put all these things together, I am very pleased to support the bill.

• (1805)

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this private member's bill today, particularly because it deals with Canada's retirement income system. This is an issue about which I and the Conservative government feel very strongly.

Seniors in my riding of North Vancouver, and indeed across Canada, have spent their lives working hard to build stronger communities within a more prosperous Canada. Many seniors have made great sacrifices to provide the lifestyle and privileges that so many of us enjoy and sometimes take for granted. It is their hard work that has helped make Canada the greatest nation in the world.

We have tremendous respect for Canadian seniors. That is why our government has been demonstrating our commitment to them for more than seven years.

For example, we established October 1 as National Seniors Day. We have funded more than 11,000 new horizons for seniors program projects in hundreds of communities across Canada, including in my community of North Vancouver. We have invested in helping seniors quickly access information about the programs and services they need in their communities. We have passed the Protecting Canada's Seniors Act.

The Protecting Canada's Seniors Act is an important piece of legislation regarding a very critical issue. It will help ensure consistent, tough penalties for crimes involving elder abuse. The act confirms that age and other personal circumstances will be considered as aggravating factors for criminals who target the elderly.

Our government has also taken concrete action to ensure that seniors and pensioners continue to have more money in their pockets, so that they can enjoy the quality of life they have worked so hard to achieve. For example, we have introduced pension income splitting, doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for pension income credit, increased the maximum GIS earnings exemption to \$3,500, increased the age credit by \$1,000 in 2006 and another \$1,000 in 2009, and increased the age limit for maturing pensions and RRSPs to 71 from 69 years of age. The government has also introduced the highly praised tax free savings account and cut the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. Overall, our action has resulted in the delivery of over \$2.7 billion in targeted tax relief to seniors.

Let me tell the House about some of the seniors who are benefiting. People like Harold and Shirley, a retired couple, are real people. For many years, they worked hard and paid their taxes. Each year, they receive \$55,000 and \$25,000 respectively in pension

Private Members' Business

income. As a result of the actions our government has taken since 2006, they now have more money in their pockets.

Harold and Shirley are expected to pay \$2,260 less in personal income tax. This includes about \$700, which they have saved by taking advantage of pension income splitting, and about \$960 from the doubling of the pension income credit and the increases in the age credit. They are also paying \$740 less because of our GST cut. This adds up to a total of \$3,000 in tax relief for 2013 alone. This allows Harold and Shirley to keep more of their pension income right where it belongs: in their wallets.

This year's economic action plan builds on these efforts and contains more measures to benefit seniors. For example, we are expanding tax relief for home care services to include personal care services for those who, due to age, infirmity or disability, require assistance at home. Our government is supporting palliative care services by providing the Pallium Foundation of Canada with \$3 million over the next three years to support training for front-line health care providers. We are assisting in the construction and renovation of accessible community facilities by investing \$15 million a year in the enabling accessibility fund.

Seniors are benefiting not only from these measures but also from our country's strong retirement income system. This system is based on three pillars. The first pillar is the old age security program, which provides a basic minimum pension for all Canadians.

The second pillar includes the Canada pension plan and Quebec pension plan. These plans ensure a basic level of earning replacement for working Canadians. They currently provide over \$45 billion per year in benefits.

• (1810)

The third pillar of Canada's retirement system includes tax-assisted private savings opportunities to allow Canadians to accumulate additional retirement savings. This includes registered pension plans, registered retirement savings plans, and, as I mentioned earlier, the tax-free savings account we introduced.

Though this three-pillar system is strong, we have taken action to improve it. In 2012, our government passed Bill C-25, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, to provide employers, employees, and the self-employed with an accessible large-scale and low-cost pension option.

For millions of Canadians, PRPPs, as they are called, will provide access to a low-cost pension arrangement for the very first time. They will enable more workers to benefit from the lower investment management costs that result in a large pooled pension plan.

PRPPs are portable and represent a tremendous opportunity for many employees and small businesses that want greater pension plan options as they prepare for retirement.

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The Canadian Federation of Independent Business welcomed our PRPP legislation, stating that “PRPPs will be an excellent addition to the retirement savings options for small business owners and their employees.”

We agree. PRPPs are an outstanding addition that will benefit millions of Canadians. It is estimated that 60% of Canadians are not provided with a pension plan by their employer. PRPPs would fill this gap.

I would also like to note that the system our government is building on is one of the greatest retirement income systems in the world. Canada's retirement income system is recognized around the world as a model that succeeds in reducing poverty among seniors. It also provides high levels of replacement income to retirees.

Andrew Coyne of the *National Post* wrote:

By most measures, Canada's retirement income support system is an outstanding success. The poverty rate for Canadian seniors...is among the lowest in the world.

He is correct.

Unfortunately, the bill we are debating today, Bill C-513, does nothing to benefit Canada's strong and world-renowned retirement income system and brings no value to helping seniors. In fact, the private member's bill from the member for York West could seriously impair key aspects of the existing pension and retirement savings system. It falsely claims to provide a retirement income bill of rights, but in fact the bill would only impact pensions that are federally regulated—that is, less than 10% of all pension plans in Canada. To be clear, over 90% of all pension plans in Canada are not covered by this bill.

The bill also unnecessarily duplicates existing provisions in federal pension legislation, such as information disclosure provisions to pension plan members and retirees, and fiduciary requirements for pension plan administrators.

Bill C-513 also falsely claims to enhance the financial literacy of Canadians. Indeed, the bill is repetitive and would introduce needless complexities to our government's actions in this area over the past years.

With financial products constantly evolving, we know that financial literacy is an increasingly necessary skill for all Canadians to learn. As November is Financial Literacy Month, I am pleased to note that our government has taken action to increase the financial knowledge of Canadians. We began by establishing the task force on financial literacy and committing additional funding to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada to undertake financial literacy activities.

We passed Bill C-28, the financial literacy leader act, to allow for the appointment of a financial literacy leader. Once appointed, the financial literacy leader will work with stakeholders across the country and direct a national strategy on financial literacy. This will empower Canadians by equipping them with the skills they need to make the best financial choices.

This year's budget also committed to better protecting seniors who use financial services. This initiative will be completed by working with banks and other financial institutions to ensure they develop and distribute clear information. This will help ensure seniors get the

information they need about powers of attorney and other bank services geared toward seniors' needs.

Our commitment to financial literacy is clear. What is also clear is that this private member's bill is simply not in the best interests of Canadians.

We will continue to take action to benefit Canadians and seniors and to create prosperity for them and for all Canadians.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1815)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 28, I inquired of the government how its recent decision to exempt in situ oil sands projects from the federal Environmental Assessment Act was consistent with its publicly-expressed commitment to balance resource development and its publicly-announced new respectful working relationship with first nations. I asked this in the wake of repeated concerns expressed by first nations about the failure of the federal government to intervene to protect their constitutional and treaty rights.

The rather confusing response by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment was that environmental assessments were shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments and they, presumably the federal government, had made environmental protection laws stricter, while making environmental assessments more efficient and effective. Efficient and effective to what end, one may validly ask, fast tracking resource extraction by avoiding reviews and hearings? Are we to believe that exempting major projects for environmental assessments are stricter protection laws? Is this what the government considers balance?

I sought this clarification as this past month the government chose, absent any consultation, to downgrade federal environmental assessment laws to exempt in situ oil sands projects from any federal review or hearing.

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First, the decision ignores federal jurisdiction and duties to address any transboundary impacts and overriding duties to address impacts to aboriginal peoples, lands and their rights and interests from resource development. Decisions to reduce consultation on project impacts also abrogates federal Crown duties of advanced consultation, consideration and accommodation of aboriginal right and title.

Second, significantly delayed action to protect threatened caribou and bison herds in the wake of ongoing approvals of massive bitumen extraction projects further erodes the ability of the federal government to deliver on its languishing duties under the Species at Risk Act to protect threatened species and their critical habitat. It is noteworthy that today the federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development issued a scathing report on the abject failure of the government to comply with the prescribed mandatory duties and timelines to protect protected species and their habitats.

Two of the most threatened species are the woodland bison and the boreal woodland caribou, whose critical remaining habitat is being sacrificed to expanded oil sands mines. Several new bitumen mines are approved and others are in application on the habitat of two critical herds of woodland bison—the Ronald Lake herd—and boreal woodland caribou. These herds graze on the lands adjacent to the Poplar Point reserve, residence of the Athabasca Chipewyan peoples who rely on these herds for their sustenance. The habitat has reportedly been zoned by Alberta to allow bitumen mining.

The government is making these decisions in the face of repeated requests by the first nations to protect these herds and their habitat and in the face of decisions by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. The Federal Court ruled two years ago that then minister of environment Jim Prentice had erred in law in holding that he was not required to consider impacts to aboriginal right and title when making decisions under the Species at Risk Act. How many more court challenges must these impacted first nations face before the government finally takes action to protect these threatened species and their habitat?

• (1820)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting the environment while supporting our economy.

Canada's natural resource sector employs 1.8 million Canadians, many in skilled, high-paying jobs. Resource development generates \$30 billion annually in revenue, and we are making sure that aboriginal peoples have every opportunity to benefit from this development.

Environmental assessments help us to meet these objectives, and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 strengthens environmental protection and brings the federal regime into the 21st century. Our government is making environmental protection laws stricter while making environmental assessments more efficient and effective.

Let me be clear, in situ oil sands projects have never been included as part of federal environmental legislation or regulation. Therefore, there has been no downgrading of environmental

assessment. Federal permitting and approvals processes related to in situ projects have not changed.

I would like to remind the member opposite that environmental assessments are a shared responsibility between federal and provincial governments, and our government is doing our part.

What our government has done is strengthen federal environmental assessment to make sure we focus on those major projects that have the greatest potential for significant adverse environmental effects in areas of federal jurisdiction. Our government has actually increased fines and penalties for those who break environmental laws.

One of the key pillars of our government's support for the responsible development of our resources is enhancing consultations with aboriginal groups. Our government has made and continues to make significant investments that allow aboriginal people to participate in environmental assessments. For those projects where a federal environmental assessment is required, we encourage and actively support aboriginal participation in the environmental assessment process.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency provides financial assistance specifically to aboriginal groups to prepare for and participate in consultation activities associated with environmental assessments. This financial support strengthens the ability of aboriginal groups to participate in the environmental assessment of major projects that affect them, and helps the federal government to make better decisions informed by the views and perspectives of aboriginal peoples.

However, building stronger relationships requires more than just consultation. Our government continues to work with aboriginal partners in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration to build and renew our relationships. We do this because we recognize the essential role that aboriginal people have in the environmental stewardship of the lands and waters of our great country. Our government is proud of the work that we have done to strengthen relationships with aboriginal peoples, and we remain committed to making sure that these strong relationships continue to translate into opportunities for all aboriginal peoples.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to a reiteration by the second parliamentary secretary of the same statement that allegedly the government has made stricter federal environmental laws.

I look forward to the parliamentary secretary outlining to this place what these new stricter environmental protection laws are that are going to ensure protection of first nation rights and interests, and of threatened species.

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I also wonder if the parliamentary secretary agrees with the recent decisions by the Alberta energy regulator to deny standing to first nations and Metis in oil sands expansion projects, and to deny the request for a buffer between recently appended lands for traditional harvest and a major new oil sands operation.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, our government has always been and will continue to be committed to consulting with Canadians, including aboriginal people, and giving careful consideration to their concerns.

Building relationships with aboriginal groups and encouraging and supporting their active participation in the review of projects is essential to making sure that aboriginal peoples can benefit from the economic development opportunities associated with these projects. Aboriginal participation during environmental assessments that may affect them also helps in the decision-making process.

Our government will continue to engage and consult with aboriginal peoples as part of our support for the responsible development of Canada's resources.

* * *

● (1825)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we go from lack of consultation and accommodation with regard to resource development to lack of consultation and accommodation with regard to the first nation education act.

I asked the minister whether or not he would look at closing the funding gap. In the minister's response, he said that they would pay the cost of education at the secondary and elementary levels for first nations, but it was lacking in any kind of true commitment in detail.

I want to turn, for a moment, to a letter written on June 13, 2011, from the then provincial minister of education in British Columbia to the then minister of aboriginal affairs. There are a couple of points in here that are important. The minister is talking about a number of agreements that take place between B.C. first nations and the Province of British Columbia. He says that, "The form of agreement between the province and an interested first nation is significant. It is not a typical agreement as between the province and a service provider. It is a government-to-government agreement. Much of the language that typically is in a service agreement is not in this agreement. In this respect, it is unique and recognizes the TCA 2005 commitment to strengthen the relationship on a government-to-government basis".

In the closing of the letter it says, "While the province and first nations often go forward on parallel agendas, the province does not provide oversight of first nations' education on first nations' lands, nor over the various initiatives of the FNSA or FNESC. This respects the integrity of the commitment of establishing a new relationship based on mutual respect and recognition".

Those two points are important when we come to talk about funding.

I also want to mention the report "Nurturing the Learning Spirit of First Nations Students". That report clearly outlined statutory

funding that is needs-based, predictable, sustainable and used specifically for education purposes.

The minister led any listeners, and this House, to believe that somehow what is in the draft proposal meets that requirement. In fact, it does not.

I want to turn to something that comes from Australia. It is a document that talks about what ministerial obligations are.

In the introduction, it says:

how to determine whether a legislative provision imposes an obligation or confers a discretion;...

It goes on to talk about a particular section, section 33.

(1) states:

In any Act or instrument, the word 'may', if used to confer a power, indicates that the power may be exercised or not, at discretion.

(2) states:

In any Act or instrument, the word 'shall', if used to impose a duty, indicates that the duty must be performed.

When I look at the proposal the government has put forward, in section 31(1), on funding, it says in the notes:

This provision establishes that the Minister may fund a First Nation or a First Nation Education Authority to operate one or more schools.

It is clear that the proposed legislation does not require the government to come up with equitable funding, equitable comparable funding, to what provinces provide for their students.

When will the government provide that equitable funding?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I also appreciate the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming supporting me in giving my answer tonight.

I would remind the hon. opposition member that our government firmly believes that all first nations students across Canada deserve access to a school system that meets provincial and territorial standards while respecting first nations culture, language, rights, and treaties.

It is not just our government that has been calling for change. First nations have been advocating for greater control over their children's education for decades. This has been reiterated to the minister on numerous occasions by first nations across the country that have been pressing for education reform.

Our government is listening to these calls from first nations leadership, educators, technicians, and youth who are unhappy with the current non-system that has been failing first nations students for years. It is time to provide first nations with choice in terms of the management and delivery of education in their communities. It is time to work with them to ensure that first nations students get the education system they deserve. In short, it is time for reform of the first nations education system.

Over the past year, our government has contributed over \$1.5 billion to support first nations elementary and secondary education. On a per capita basis, this amounts to approximately \$14,000 per full-time equivalent student. Not included in this calculation is an investment of approximately \$200 million to maintain and improve education infrastructure for band-operated schools.

Despite these investments, it is clear that money is not the only solution. The non-system of education is not working for the majority of first nations students who do not graduate from high school. This is the sad reality and undeniable truth. Many with direct experience in first nations education, as well as the Auditor General of Canada, have said that this is due to a patchwork system that does not have the supports and services that are available to most Canadians.

Our government is committed to addressing this situation and is building on the successful models that already exist. That is why we have shared “Working Together for First Nation Students: a Proposal for a Bill on First Nations Education” with every first nation across the country. We have asked them to share a copy with their membership, along with provinces and key stakeholders, as part of the ongoing consultation process. We look forward to receiving everyone's feedback and input.

This draft legislative proposal would support the vision of first nations control of first nations education and would create a comprehensive framework to enable first nations to design and implement their own education systems, while meeting or exceeding minimum standards.

In addition, the proposal would ensure that education standards were equivalent to the quality of school systems off reserve and would deliver a curriculum that is reflective of first nations' unique needs, culture, and interests. This would help first nations students achieve a quality education that would allow them to move seamlessly between first nation and provincial schools and to pursue their studies in a consistent manner.

It would be up to first nations to decide how best to meet or even exceed these standards within their education programs. This draft legislative proposal is a significant step forward, in the spirit of reconciliation, in pursuing our shared goal with first nations of closing the gaps between first nations and all Canadians.

We continue to invite all first nations to provide input on the important issue of improving education outcomes and the proposed way forward.

● (1830)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, first nations schools on reserve can only dream of having \$14,000 per student per direct delivery of

Adjournment Proceedings

education. In a recent CBC interview, it was indicated that the federal government spends well over \$1 billion annually educating aboriginal children, although much of that money goes to provincial governments, since most of the kids go to provincial schools. When first nations kids on reserve go to provincial schools, they have to pay the provincial school rate, which means even less for the first nations students on reserve.

I come back to my original question. In the section on regulations, which is where the minister said the funding will be defined, it says that the minister may make any regulations. There is a huge amount of discretion in what the minister would do with regard to funding. Nowhere in the draft regulations or in this draft document does it talk about equitable funding comparable to provincial schools.

When will the government provide equitable, comparable funding to provincial schools for first nations on reserve? When?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to reforming the first nation education act and not simply addressing it with more money. We have to have reform of the system—of the non-system, as the minister has called it—before addressing the funding issue.

Our government remains committed to the principle of first nation control of first nation education. We will continue to consult with first nations to ensure that first nation students have the same opportunity as all Canadians to succeed in their education and we will continue to implement the principle of first nation control over first nation education.

We are continuing to consult with first nations to improve on-reserve education. Ultimately, all input will contribute to improved on-reserve education that guarantees base standards; provides the mechanism required for stable, predictable, and sustainable funding; and improves first nation control over first nation education.

We all need to work together to provide the quality education that will open up opportunities for first nation youth, thereby preparing them to make major life choices around post-secondary education, secure good jobs, and become self-sufficient and engaged citizens.

● (1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p. m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:35 p.m.)

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