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(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 21, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 21, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be here today, and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled Agreement Establishing the Inter-American Investment Corporation, done at Washington on November 19, 1984, and amended by resolutions adopted on September 27, 1995, March 16, 2001 and March 12, 2002. An explanatory memorandum is included with the treaty.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-554, An Act to amend the Navigable Waters Protection Act (Minnow Lake and other lakes and waterways).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to introduce the bill, a bill to protect many of Sudbury's waterways.

Following extensive public consultations this fall and this past summer, I am happy to introduce the bill to protect many of the lakes and rivers removed from environmental protection following the Conservatives' gutting of the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

This past summer and into the fall, I solicited feedback from constituents regarding which lakes and rivers in Sudbury they thought should be brought back under a proper environmental protection framework. This legislation is the culmination of a large

number of suggestions being submitted to my office, and it reflects the will of my community.

The bill lists 19 separate waterways for reinclusion on the list of protected waterways in Canada. These include Junction Creek, the Vermilion River, Ramsay Lake, Minnow Lake, and Lake Laurentian, just to name a few.

Environmental considerations should not take a back seat to economic concerns, and with the removal of restrictions over development projects crossing waterways, Sudbury's lakes and rivers have been left vulnerable to environmental upheaval.

I am proud to say that my bill is the 27th bill introduced as part of an NDP campaign to protect waterways across Canada.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

ABORTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present on behalf of constituents a petition that reminds Canadians that the definition of life in Canada is 400 years old and should be updated based on modern science.

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

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is to remind Canadians of a CBC show presented about a year ago, which pointed out that sex-selective abortion is occurring in Canada.

The petitioners call upon this Parliament to condemn that practice. They call upon us to present a common front in this Parliament that does condemn discrimination against unborn females through gender-selective abortion.

Government Orders

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to the House a petition that has been signed by 289 people living in the Quebec City area. They have noticed that many substances, including nickel, coal and iron, are polluting the air in various parts of the Quebec City area. The regional public health unit of the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de la Capitale-Nationale has said that toxic dust is harmful to people's health. Many of these contaminants come from Quebec City's port, for which the Minister of Transport of Canada has responsibility.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to make the Port of Québec accountable and ensure it has the necessary resources to address the problem.

I would also like to point out to the House that nearly 800 people signed the same petition online, meaning that more than 1,000 people are calling for a final resolution to this public health issue.

LABOUR-SPONSORED FUNDS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition concerning labour-sponsored funds, which are often used as a primary tool for saving for retirement. The middle class also uses labour-sponsored funds to save. These funds invest in small and medium-sized businesses, create jobs and spur economic development. The petitioners are asking that the government take all of the necessary measures to reverse its recent decision, which was announced in the budget on March 21, 2013, to eliminate the 15% federal tax credit granted to people who invest in labour-sponsored funds.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1010)

[Translation]

RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT

The House resumed from November 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, Respect for Communities Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-2, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

I cannot talk about Bill C-2 without making a reference to Bill C-65, the former bill introduced at the close of the last session of Parliament, which, need I remind the House, ended when the

Conservatives prorogued Parliament. All of the bills left on the table when the last session ended needed to be reintroduced and renumbered. That is why we find ourselves now completing the task at hand.

I might as well say it upfront: Bill C-2 is a thinly veiled attempt to put an end to supervised injection sites. This proposed legislation goes directly against the Supreme Court's 2011 decision that called on the minister to consider exemptions for supervised injection sites, in an effort to reconcile health and public safety considerations.

I would like to take a moment to talk about the only supervised injection site in Canada. It is located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. I do not know if my colleagues have ever been there, but it is certainly a neighbourhood where truly disturbing things happen. Everyone deserves to know what I am talking about.

InSite was set up as part of a public health initiative launched by the City of Vancouver and its community partners, after the number of overdose-related deaths in Vancouver increased twelvefold between 1987 and 1993. It took many years to get the InSite centre up and running, and each stage of the process was closely scrutinized, both locally and nationally.

The supervised injection site has the support not only of the Vancouver police, something which is by no means insignificant, but also of local businesses, the chamber of commerce and municipal politicians. The project has been the focus of over 30 scientific reports and studies that have described the benefits of InSite. These findings have been peer-reviewed and published in journals such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *British Medical Journal*. Studies of over 70 analogous supervised injection sites in Europe and Australia have recognized similar benefits.

When InSite opened in 2003, it secured an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for activities with medical and scientific applications. It is worth noting that since then, InSite has had a positive impact. It helps save lives, minimizes the risk of accidental overdoses and above all, makes the neighbourhood safer for everyone.

However, in 2008, the exemption granted to InSite under the law was set to expire. The Conservative government rejected InSite's application for renewal. The debate went all the way to the Supreme Court, which held that InSite was a key stakeholder in the health field. In its ruling, the court called upon the minister to consider all of the probative elements of the matter, bearing in mind the benefits of supervised injection sites, rather than set out a lengthy list of principles on which to base conclusions.

I would like to quote a critically important excerpt from the Supreme Court of Canada's decision, since the bill now before us is supposedly based on this ruling. Here is what the Supreme Court had to say in its decision:

Government Orders

●(1015)

On future applications, the Minister must exercise that discretion within the constraints imposed by the law and the *Charter*, aiming to strike the appropriate balance between achieving public health and public safety. In accordance with the *Charter*, the Minister must consider whether denying an exemption would cause deprivations of life and security of the person that are not in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice. Where...a supervised injection site will decrease the risk of death and disease, and there is little or no evidence that it will have a negative impact on public safety, the Minister should generally grant an exemption.

That is what the Supreme Court stated. In my opinion, this ruling is quite clear.

In my riding of Québec, I have had the opportunity to meet several times with stakeholders and volunteers, including those from Point de repères, a community organization that I would like to commend. The organization's mission consists of health promotion, prevention and the delivery of care and services, especially for people dealing with addiction. It is important to understand this difference: an organization like Point de repères does not encourage drug use, but, rather, it advocates a harm reduction approach. As the Point de repères website indicates:

The harm reduction approach is a community-based approach to health that focuses on helping people with addictions develop ways to mitigate the negative consequences of their behaviour, rather than on eliminating the use of psychotropic drugs.

I think it is important to understand the fine points of this often sensitive subject. Again, as explained on the Point de repères website:

Drug use has a significant impact on both the user and the community. Often, lack of knowledge, misconceptions and prejudices about people who use drugs lead to a series of inappropriate actions that cause additional harm to the user and the community.

I had the opportunity to watch a documentary entitled “Pas de piquerie dans mon quartier” about people's resistance to safe injection sites in their neighbourhood. The documentary shed light on the addiction issue in a city like Quebec City, for example.

The documentary's introduction, which unfortunately reflects the glaring truth, states that “the war on drugs often turned into a war on drug users. It is a bit like the war on poverty—we have to be careful not to turn it into a war on the poor”.

Why is the government so lacking in objectivity when it comes to this very sensitive issue? Why are the Conservatives refusing to recognize the facts laid out before them? The NDP believes that decisions about programs that could enhance public health should be based on facts, not ideological stances. We are not alone in thinking that. According to the Canadian Medical Association:

Supervised injection programs are an important harm reduction strategy. Harm reduction is a central pillar in a comprehensive public health approach to disease prevention and health promotion.

For its part, the Canadian Nurses Association said:

Evidence demonstrates that supervised injection sites and other harm reduction programs bring critical health and social services to vulnerable populations—especially those experiencing poverty, mental illness and homelessness.

A government that truly cared about public health and public safety would do everything in its power to improve access to prevention and treatment services, not create more barriers. Evidence has shown that supervised injection sites reduce the risk of contracting and spreading blood-borne diseases, such as HIV and

hepatitis C, and the number of overdose-related deaths. Evidence has also shown that they do not adversely affect public safety. In some cases, they actually promote it by reducing injection drug use in public, reducing the amount of violence associated with that activity, and reducing the waste associated with drug use.

Supervised injection sites strike a balance between public health and public safety goals. They also connect people who urgently need help with the health services they need, such as primary health care and addiction treatment.

●(1020)

The NDP believes that any new legislation about supervised injection sites must honour the spirit of the Supreme Court decision, which this bill does not do. As my colleague from Vancouver East has said, Bill C-2 contains as many criteria as there are letters in the alphabet, and those 26 criteria are so restrictive and biased that they are practically impossible to comply with.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the inception of InSite, it is important to recognize the great deal of effort taken by the different levels of government, such as the government in Ottawa at the time, and the provincial and municipal governments. Many different stakeholders were involved because they truly cared and wanted to make a difference in the community.

That initiative was put into place and as the years have gone by the facts speak for themselves. It clearly was a huge success, not only for the individuals who use the facility as a safer injection site but also for the community surrounding it, which is a better and safer place to be. There are many different documented benefits of just how successful it has been.

To what degree does she believe the government is basing its decision on solid evidence in bringing this legislation forward? Maybe she could provide comment on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and his comment. I agree that when it comes to supervised injection sites, consultation and discussion with the community are absolutely necessary.

This bill, like all the others, proves that the government is not listening to the people on the ground. All too often, it bases its positions and its arguments on ideological prejudices. We have noticed that this is often the problem. That is why we always have to come along with a new proposal, because we have been on the ground and have seen what is going on. We met with the stakeholders. In this case, everyone—professionals and business people in particular—agrees that we need to act and we should use this example from Vancouver East to move forward.

It is high time that this government listened to the opposition, since it will not listen to the people on the ground, because we are proposing real solutions. The work being done must absolutely continue. We cannot just close our eyes and pretend the problem does not exist, as the government across the aisle so often does.

Government Orders

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Québec for her very interesting and very important speech on this bill. I wonder if she could talk about one aspect of this debate that troubles me.

The Supreme Court often makes rulings. We have heard that this government is not listening to Canadians, but it also refuses to listen to institutions like the Supreme Court, which has issued an important ruling on this important matter.

In its decision in the Khadr case, the Supreme Court also said that the rule of law requires the government to act in a way that respects the Constitution. Does my colleague think that the government is once again going against a Supreme Court decision?

• (1025)

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. My colleague is always full of wisdom.

The Conservative government is indeed not respecting the rights of these people by going ahead as it is doing. They want to close their eyes and hope these people suddenly stop existing. They would like there to be no more drug users, but that is not the case. These people have rights that must be respected.

That is what the Supreme Court says. Everyone's rights must be respected, including the rights of drug users. That is how we must move forward. The Supreme Court's decision urges the minister to pay close attention to that. This file should not be abandoned along with all the work that has been done on this first supervised injection site. We really should not wipe that work out only to have to rebuild everything later.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour to stand in the House and follow my colleagues in speaking on such an important issue and one that relates to the piece of legislation that we have before us, Bill C-2, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

First of all, I would like to indicate, as my colleagues have done, that we in the NDP oppose the bill. Essentially Bill C-2 is a thinly veiled effort to stop supervised injection sites from operating, a direct defiance of a Supreme Court ruling on these sites. The legislation sets out a lengthy and arduous list of criteria that supervised injection sites would need to meet before the minister would grant them an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. These criteria would make it much harder for organizations to open safe injection sites in Canada.

I am proud to be part of a party that has long advocated for safe injection sites and a party that has indicated that we need to find ways to be able to support people who have fallen through the cracks, who suffer with addiction, who are keen to get out of the trap that so many face and who need help to do so.

The NDP believes that decisions about programs that may benefit public health must be based on facts and not ideology. In 2011, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that InSite provided life-saving services and should remain open with a section 56 exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

The court ruled that it was within InSite users' charter rights to access the service and that similar services should also be allowed to operate with an exemption. Over 30 peer-reviewed studies published in journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet*, the *British Medical Journal* and others have described the beneficial impact of InSite.

Furthermore, studies on over 70 safe injection sites in Europe and Australia have shown similar benefits. InSite is one of the greatest public health achievements in our country. We in the NDP believe that it and similarly beneficial sites should be allowed to operate under proper supervision.

That is why we are so concerned to see Bill C-2 in front of us here today. This is a bill that is fundamentally based on ideology and is not based on evidence. It is certainly not based on what we are hearing from people in the medical profession who are saying that InSite and other operations like it are extremely important in being able to lead to harm reduction, to save lives, to get people on the right path to heal from their addictions, and to integrate back into their communities and into a life of dignity.

Bill C-2 is a deeply flawed bill based on an anti-drug ideology and false fears for public safety. This is another attempt to rally the Conservative base, as evidenced by the fundraising drive entitled "keep heroin out of our backyards" that started hours after Bill C-2 was introduced in Parliament. However, the bill, which would make it almost impossible to open safe injection sites, will actually put heroin back into our neighbourhoods.

Another reason we find the bill extremely problematic is that Bill C-2 directly defies the 2011 Supreme Court ruling, which called on the minister to consider exemptions for safe injection sites based on a balance between public health and safety. It called on the minister to consider all the evidence on the benefits of safe injection sites rather than setting out a lengthy list of principles by which to apply judgments.

We in the NDP believe that any further legislation on supervised injection sites should respect the spirit of the Supreme Court's decision, which is not the case with this bill. The NDP believes that harm reduction programs, including safe injection sites, should be granted exemptions based on evidence of their ability to improve a community's health and preserve human life, not ideology.

There is currently only one operational supervised injection site in Canada, InSite, which is located in Vancouver. Since it opened, Vancouver has seen a 35% decrease in overdose deaths. Furthermore, InSite has been shown to decrease crime, communicable disease infection rates, and relapse rates for drug users.

Government Orders

• (1030)

InSite, as many people will know, opened as part of a public health plan by the Vancouver Coastal Health authority and its community partners following a twelvefold increase in overdose deaths in Vancouver between 1987 and 1993. At the time, the Vancouver area was also seeing drastic increases in communicable diseases among injection drug users, including hepatitis A, B, and C and HIV/AIDS.

InSite was originally granted an exemption in 2003 to operate under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for medical and scientific purposes, to both provide services and to research the effectiveness of supervised injection facilities. Section 56 of the current Controlled Drugs and Substances Act grants the minister authority to approve operations utilizing drugs for medical, scientific, or law enforcement purposes. In 2007, the OnSite detox centre was added to the site.

The InSite organization and the work that happens on the Vancouver east side is something that leads to better lives, not only for people who suffer from addiction but also for the broader community. I want to read into the record what people who support InSite and harm reduction measures based on medical evidence have said.

Pivot Legal Society, the HIV/AIDS Legal Network, and the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition issued a statement on Bill C-2. It was a statement first made when Bill C-65 was introduced. They said:

The bill is an irresponsible initiative that ignores both the extensive evidence that such health services are needed and effective, and the human rights of Canadians with addictions...

It is unethical, unconstitutional and damaging to both public health and the public purse to block access to supervised consumption services...

The Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Nurses Association have both criticized the government for bringing forward Bill C-2. The Canadian Medical Association said:

Supervised injection programs are an important harm reduction strategy. Harm reduction is a central pillar in a comprehensive public health approach to disease prevention and health promotion.

Let us move on to other practitioners in the health care field. The Canadian Nurses Association said:

Evidence demonstrates that supervised injection sites and other harm reduction programs bring critical health and social services to vulnerable populations—especially those experiencing poverty, mental illness and homelessness. A government truly committed to public health and safety would work to enhance access to prevention and treatment services—instead of building more barriers.

Based on the validation of these positions we have heard from people who are involved in the medical field, based on people who work and live in Vancouver's east side, and based on the figures that overdoses have decreased by 35%, the evidence is clear. There is a great deal indicating that the government is going down the wrong path.

What is especially disconcerting is that the government is willing to ignore and disrespect a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada that has ruled on this very issue. I wish I could say that this was shocking, but the government has shown great disregard for the work of the Supreme Court, certainly when it comes to areas that,

ideologically, the government does not see eye to eye on. It is deeply disconcerting and problematic for a lot of people who are tuning in, whether to this debate or to Parliament, frankly, every day to see a government that was elected to represent the best interests of Canadians make decisions that are not based on evidence, science, or respect for the Supreme Court, the highest court of our country. It bases them on ideology and fearmongering.

I think of the people in my constituency who suffer from addiction, who are in a cycle of poverty, unemployment, and living in third world conditions, in many cases. They are unable to access help, because the same federal government has cut funding for important healing programs, including the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and other initiatives that helped people in my part of the country. I think of the many people across Canada who are increasingly struggling as the cost of living goes up, as employment leaves their regions, as they struggle to make do with what little they have. Often they are vulnerable to some of these same cycles of addiction and violence. I think of the fact that the government has a chance to act by retracting Bill C-2 and standing with us on the opposition side for harm reduction and healthier, better lives for people and communities across this country.

• (1035)

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's remarks, as I have on other days in debate. A few days previously, one of her colleagues from Vancouver went through the specific criteria. At that time, I asked which specific criteria in the bill that set out where a safe injection site might be placed the hon. member objected to. Does the hon. member object to all the specific criteria?

I understand the philosophical problems the hon. member has with the bill, but are there specific criteria in the proposed legislation that the hon. member supports? Are there specific criteria the hon. member objects to? Could she provide some examples, both for and against?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I would correct my colleague. I never referenced philosophical issues. I referenced science, evidence, and facts. It may be difficult for the other side to understand, as I understand that there is a difficulty grasping these concepts on that side of the House.

I think I, along with my colleagues, have been pretty clear in indicating that the issue here is the barriers that would be set up. InSite, and other communities that would like to start a similar program, would face a process that is so onerous it would be challenging for them to put it together.

They clearly already do a lot of work to get all the permits and follow all the rules. There is no question about that. However, Bill C-2 is attempting to make this such a difficult task that organizations like InSite would not have the capacity to do what needs to be done.

If the Conservative government truly cared about making a difference when it comes to harm reduction and getting heroin out of our neighbourhoods, as they put it, or crack cocaine—although some people they know seem to be quite connected to that substance—maybe they would talk to the medical practitioners about what needs to be done.

Government Orders

Supporting InSite, supporting harm reduction programs, is where it is at. Let us listen to the professionals and the people living in the communities who want this to happen. Let us support them instead of standing in their way.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her presentation. We in the Liberal Party certainly share the same feelings about taking a very scientific and evidence-based approach to this very important issue.

The reality is that drug addicts are among the most unfortunate people on this earth. It is not something one goes into because one decides to become a drug addict. Very often, drug addicts, of course, have more serious problems that have possibly driven them to become drug addicts, yet some members from the government side, when they are hyperbolic, seem to treat InSite locations as if they will actually attract innocent people who want to take drugs, who want to become addicts, rather than understanding that this is for harm reduction.

Why does the member think this is the approach of the Conservative government toward this very important issue?

• (1040)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, it really is mystifying. It is the year 2013, and science, medicine, and specialists have made it clear that, based on the evidence, InSite, harm reduction techniques, and safe injection sites make a difference. They make a difference because they save lives. They support communities. They support families that have family members and loved ones struggling with addiction.

I would challenge any member in this House who knows anyone who has struggled or is struggling with addiction to see how important it is for them to have services to access so that they can get help. What the government is doing, unfortunately, is standing in the way of people who need this help the most. It is standing in the way of services, knowledge, and a practice that we know is proven. Instead, the Conservatives are using the same old techniques of fearmongering. They are talking about heroin in the backyards of Canadians to change the facts, to change the conversation, rather than actually working with Canadian communities to make a difference, which is what we in the NDP would like the government to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of Sherbrookers to speak to this very important issue for all Canadians.

Bill C-2 is a thinly veiled attempt by the Conservatives to prevent supervised injection sites from being set up, or continuing their operations. There is currently only one such site in Canada. This is a thinly veiled manoeuvre to oppose this kind of supervised injection site.

Several scientific studies conducted by researchers have demonstrated the benefits of such sites, where people can go and inject drugs safely. Otherwise, they would do it in the streets of our communities.

The Conservative logic in all this is quite impressive and baffling. The Conservatives say that having supervised injection sites would

result in more drugs on our streets. However, precisely the opposite is true, and studies have documented and demonstrated that on many occasions.

We of course cite the example of Vancouver East, the only place where a supervised injection site is located. It was ultimately observed that this produced benefits for the entire community. Needles, or everything people use to take drugs, ultimately wind up in supervised locations instead of in parks and public places, where they endanger neighbourhood residents.

You have children, Mr. Speaker. I do not for the moment, but I am sure you would prefer that those needles be left in safe places and disposed of safely rather than have your children walk around in a park or on the street and possibly find dirty needles, with all the danger that entails. You would prefer, as I do, that experienced people dispose of those needles safely. They know how that works and they can also help people who are addicted to certain drugs.

These sites therefore have clear and obvious benefits. It is unfortunate that the government is using this bill to put up all possible barriers to any future establishment of other injection facilities elsewhere in Canada. The obstacles are enormous, with conditions that are just about impossible to meet. To open a facility, 30 requirements must be met.

As I said earlier, the government's thinly disguised objective with this bill is to stop other facilities from opening and prevent the one that already exists from continuing to operate.

It is sad to see the Conservatives using this for partisan purposes and even in order to raise funds. A few hours after introducing the bill in the House, they sent an email to their members, their supporters and the people on their email lists to tell them that the Conservatives would be protecting communities better, and then they asked for money from their supporters, with Bill C-2.

It is very obvious that they are using this issue to collect funds. They want to paint themselves as the great defenders of safety in our communities, while all the studies are showing exactly the opposite: that it is safer to have supervised injection sites.

• (1045)

In addition, it is important to mention that 80% of the people in Vancouver East support the supervised injection site. The Conservatives are saying that the whole community is in danger, that the people are against it, that it cannot be left open and that it must be closed as quickly as possible, while 80% of the people in Vancouver East are in favour of this supervised injection site. I do not understand why the Conservatives are saying that the centre is dangerous, it has to be closed, and people do not like it and do not want it in their backyard, when 80% of the people in the neighbourhood involved are in favour of it.

Government Orders

The other element that really surprises me is the fact that the Conservatives are going against a Supreme Court decision, which was handed down following a number of other legal proceedings. All the courts, from the British Columbia Supreme Court to the Supreme Court of Canada, came to the same conclusion, despite the opposition of the Conservatives and the government. All the courts have always been in favour of these facilities and have always recognized the rights of the people using them. Section 7 of the charter states that:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

The government tried to defend its position before the various levels of court. Finally, the Supreme Court rendered its decision saying that the infringement at stake is serious; it threatens the health, indeed the lives, of the claimants and others like them.

The Supreme Court itself—the highest court in the country—supports our position that people have the right to have access to these sites in order to protect their own charter-guaranteed rights.

The Conservatives are acting as though nothing has happened and doing the opposite of what the Supreme Court asked them to do. I am rather surprised to see a government respond to a court decision in that way. Since the decision did not go their way, the Conservatives decided to pass legislation that goes against the Supreme Court's decision.

It is rare for a government to behave in such a manner, and it is unfortunate that the Conservatives are thumbing their noses at courts that are recognized as being impartial. No one has ever questioned that. As legislators, it is an affront to the justice system for the Conservatives to try to defend a position in court and then go against the court's decision when it does not go their way. It is unfortunate to see this happening.

There is a lot of talk about public health and safety. It is often said that supervised injection sites strike a balance between public health and public safety. The court also recognized that. These sites strike a certain balance between the two poles because both are equally important.

It has been shown that supervised injection sites can enhance public safety by getting illicit substances off our streets and putting them in safe and supervised locations. These substances have not been legalized; their injection is merely supervised.

●(1050)

What is more, in most cases, the people who come to these sites are referred to community resources that can help them to overcome their addictions. This approach ensures that there is a good balance between public health and public safety, which is something that the NDP will always support. We are therefore going to oppose Bill C-2.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech on Bill C-2. It is very important that all members of the House stand up and be counted on the bill, which essentially is thumbing its nose at the Supreme Court of Canada.

As my colleagues have previously said in the House, we have this repetition of a policy of the government ignoring the Supreme Court of Canada. We saw it with the Wheat Board, we saw it with endangered species, and now we are seeing it with a critical health matter dealing with people's unfortunate addiction to drugs. What is particularly reprehensible is that, in reading the bill, we see that its clear intent is to prevent the establishment of any further drug injection sites. That runs directly contrary to what Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin said in the Supreme Court ruling, which was:

Where, as here, a supervised injection site will decrease the risk of death and disease, and there is little or no evidence that it will have a negative impact on public safety, the Minister should generally grant an exemption.

I wonder if the hon. member could speak to that and speak to the calibre of intervenors in that Supreme Court case, showing the strong support from the medical establishment in favour of supporting injection sites.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Edmonton—Strathcona for her excellent speech.

The government is indeed thumbing its nose at the Supreme Court. The member mentioned other files where the Conservatives have ignored Supreme Court rulings. It is also true that hundreds of experts, some of the most respected in this field, support supervised injection sites. All the studies prove that these sites are useful and beneficial.

Once again, the Conservatives are ignoring the science because of ideology and partisanship. They are using the situation to raise funds. This is the first time that I have seen a government go into fundraising mode hours after introducing a bill.

It is rather strange for legislators to use a new bill to raise funds for a political party. It is deplorable for a government to be doing this. Furthermore, the government is rejecting the scientific studies that show the benefits of such sites. This is just unbelievable. It is a shame to see a government acting this way in 2013.

●(1055)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is also surprising that very few Conservatives are taking the time to express their opinions and defend their bill in this debate. I am not quite sure what that means. I have the impression that they feel they have made up their minds, no matter what arguments we, the MPs, and Canadians might put forward. This negates the democratic process and our parliamentary structures.

Can my colleague tell us how important it is to debate such issues?

People who use heroin must first dilute it. Homeless people living on the street may not have any water with them and have to find some. They might resort to using the water from a puddle that could contain oil, or urine or who knows what else. This is a public health hazard; these people can become infected. Others might get infected by using dirty needles. This translates into economic costs for our society, which I find deplorable.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his comments and question.

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To answer his question, I think it is clear that the government is not even making an effort to outline its position on many of its bills. This is not the first time we have seen that no members are prepared to take the floor or share their views on a bill. Is that because the Conservative MPs are scared that their views make no sense and they have a hard time explaining them to Canadians? It also demonstrates a lack of respect for a democratic institution like Parliament, which is a place for debate and for moving bills forward.

The government does not seem to care about the debates in the House of Commons. That is shameful. I agree with my colleague's comments.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure today to talk about Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. What we are actually discussing is supervised injection sites.

Do we live in a perfect world? In a perfect world, everyone is well educated, everyone lives well, everyone is happy and everything is fine. The reality, however, is that we do not live in a perfect world. Children do not go to school as much as we would wish, people do not necessarily have the job they want, and in many cases, basic needs are not met. Unfortunately, some people descend into the hell of drug use.

Once that happens, and we find that people are descending into the hell of drug use generation after generation, what do we do? What do we do as a society? The bill compels us to ask that question. As a society, what do we do when the issue arises? How do we respond in a civilized and effective manner? This is important. Everything depends on it.

The bill is a response by the government to a 2011 Supreme Court decision. The court based its decision on fundamental principles of our society, namely the right to life, liberty and security of the person. I am not talking just about those living in the hell of drug use, but also about those who may be exposed to it indirectly or by misfortune. This is where we get to the crux of the issue.

A supervised injection site reduces the risk of death and disease. Public safety must also be taken into account, of course. This cannot be done just anyhow and anywhere. Such things must be regulated. Reducing the number of needle-borne diseases like hepatitis C or HIV, and reducing the number of overdoses, is no small thing. We know that supervised injection sites make results like this possible.

Our deliberations should be based essentially on the public interest. What do we mean by "the public interest"? Some demagogues will say that the NDP is just defending drug users, but that is not the case. The NDP wants to make sure that harm is reduced to a minimum and that as many people as possible can overcome their problems. That is what "the public interest" means. We do not want children and young people falling into that world. If they are caught up in it, we want them to get out as quickly as possible, so that they can make a positive contribution to society.

We cannot think that someone who has succumbed to drug use once or twice will never do anything worthwhile in life. We cannot think that way. We must be able to give such people a chance, so that they have a real opportunity to make something of their lives. The reason they turned to drugs in the first place is that they saw no way

out, no opportunity. They did not think they had the resources to achieve some level of happiness.

To get back to supervised injection sites, if we think about it seriously, the concept for such sites is primarily one of a front-line health care service.

● (1100)

Let me explain. To take the Vancouver example: nurses and paramedics supervise activities. People using the injection site are assessed. They can also be treated if things go wrong. Detoxification services are available nearby. It is easier to reach addicts, and offer them a way out. In our society, it is not possible for workers to go into the streets and go up to people one by one and tell them that services are available and they are invited to make use of them. That is not how it works; we do not have the resources to do it. By bringing them into a safe place where they do as little harm to themselves as possible, and where they can then be offered a way out, I believe we are working in the public interest.

I would like to give an example of something that upsets parents. They believe it is unacceptable to find used syringes in the parks in some cities. As parents, we do not like finding traces of drug use scattered about where children may go to play. Nobody wants that. By moving the activity to a site, getting people to do it safely, concentrating our health care resources—which, as we know, are hard-pressed—and optimizing our health care services through this kind of response, I believe we are working in the public interest. We are thus able to offer a better society to many people, both those who are living through the hell of drug use, and people to whom the children should not be exposed unnecessarily. There are enough bad examples in our society. We do not need more, we need fewer.

That is why I fail to understand some aspects of this legislation. The application process for setting up such sites and the increased complexity may discourage more than one community from trying to take responsibility and resolve or at least address the problem. There is no magic remedy, but if we add to the paperwork, the requirements and so on, are we working in the public interest? Is that not, rather, a much more ideological position? Basically, they want to see no evil, they want to be repressive and hope that it solves the problem, but history tells us that such a strategy will never really succeed.

When they tried to prohibit alcohol nearly a century ago, we saw what happened and how people reacted. I do not mean that we have to put up with people injecting just anything, but in this 21st century, we should have 21st-century solutions. We should provide care based on the knowledge we have acquired about how to treat people. First and foremost, the debate should be about the public interest, and I call upon all parliamentarians present to think about the debate on the basis of the public interest.

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•(1105)

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague across the way. As he brought out, it was the criteria from the Supreme Court decision that highlighted the importance of scientific evidence and proper consultation.

I have a question for him relating to that. Why would the NDP be opposed to scientific evidence and consultation? It seems as though New Democrats believe that the decisions have all been made and they do not want to hear any more scientific evidence, other than what their ideology is. They have heard it all and they do not want to hear anything more.

However, the courts clearly said that we need to have clear and scientific evidence. Why would New Democrats be opposed to that? Why are their ideologies getting in the way of current scientific evidence, and why would they be opposed to hearing from neighbourhoods?

We are talking about future supervised injection site considerations. Why would New Democrats not want to hear from the neighbourhoods where such sites are being considered? Why do they not want to hear from families and from health professionals and hear current scientific evidence? Why is ideology getting in their way of supporting the bill?

This is what the courts have said. These are the criteria. We have listened to the courts and put this into the bill. Why would they oppose even what the courts are asking for?

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question, which raises two important issues. First of all, scientific knowledge is obviously something we believe in. There is no doubt about it. As a matter of fact, more than 30 scientific studies have shown that the approach used in Vancouver is effective.

The member also mentioned communities. Our role is not to force communities to support the bill, obviously. I believe that community acceptance will play a key role in each situation. It will be up to each community to assess whether this approach would be appropriate and helpful in their context. We can think about what is happening in Quebec City right now, where proposals for the grain elevators are considered unacceptable by the community. It shows what happens when one tries to implement a project without community support. We know how important that support is.

•(1110)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very reasonable and sensible speech. I also want to remind all parliamentarians that the Vancouver supervised injection site is a great success. It works; it saves lives. People who use these services are more likely to take steps to overcome their addiction. The Conservatives argue that it makes no sense to help people inject drugs in a safe way. Are we to conclude that letting addicts inject drugs in an unsafe way would be a better way to help them?

I would like my colleague to comment on the fact that, far from encouraging drug addiction, these centres help people recover from addiction, a very positive goal.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. His comments go to two issues at the very heart of my speech: public interest and effective interventions.

We are not living in the 19th century anymore. Treatments have evolved. Nowadays, professionals from various disciplines can work together to treat people who have fallen prey to drugs. Concerted action is key. Parliamentarians from all political stripes all want the same thing: to see fewer and fewer people fall prey to drugs. That is the end goal, the most important thing. It is a public interest issue. We must use all the treatment tools and knowledge at our disposal to curb that problem.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you have no idea how disappointed I am with this bill. One would think that over the years we would get used to these kinds of laws that do more harm to the public than anything else, but I cannot get used to it. Bill C-2 is a very important reminder of that reality.

There are several elements in this bill that remind us just what the Conservatives represent. They are ideologues, they ignore scientific evidence and they even disregard rulings from the highest court in the country. It is absurd. This bill is first and foremost a way to dismiss the idea of supervised injection sites, just like they tried to do with InSite in Vancouver.

We need to put this bill in context. This bill was introduced because the Supreme Court ruled that the only supervised injection site in Canada—InSite in Vancouver—was necessary and that the Minister of Health should continue to give the facility an exemption. The court based its decision on section 7 of the charter, which states:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

The Supreme Court decision states:

On future applications, the Minister must exercise that discretion within the constraints imposed by the law and the *Charter*, aiming to strike the appropriate balance between achieving public health and public safety. In accordance with the *Charter*, the Minister must consider whether denying an exemption would cause deprivations of life and security of the person that are not in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice. Where, as here, a supervised injection site will decrease the risk of death and disease, and there is little or no evidence that it will have a negative impact on public safety, the Minister should generally grant an exemption.

I have a lot of questions. The court recognized the positive impact that supervised injection sites have had in east Vancouver, and its ruling was unequivocal:

InSite has saved lives and improved health without increasing the incidence of drug use and crime in the surrounding area.

I repeat, “without increasing the incidence of drug use and crime in the surrounding area”. The court is not the only one to say this. The Canadian Nurses Association agrees:

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In Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where the Insite safe injection site is located, business owners, service providers and residents in the neighbourhood agree that the clinic has had a positive impact on the health of the people who use it and on the health of the community.

That is a fundamental aspect of this debate. While sites like InSite can improve the situation, the Conservatives want to ban them. The campaign of misinformation the Conservative Party launched just after the bill was introduced is proof enough.

• (1115)

As a health care professional, I find this bill mind-boggling. I want to add my voice to those of people in the field who have criticized this bill. The Canadian Nurses Association is concerned that:

...the conservative "tough on crime" ideology will overshadow evidence that demonstrates positive outcomes for communities with harm reduction programs.

The Canadian Medical Association had this to say:

The CMA fully endorses the existence of these harm-reduction tools, including supervised injection sites, and believes they should be included in a comprehensive national drug strategy. The CMA's position is founded upon clinical evidence. Bill [C-2], it would appear, is founded upon ideology that seeks to hinder initiatives to mitigate the very real challenges and great personal harm caused by drug abuse.

The CMA represents all of the doctors in the country. It added the following, which is even more critical of this government:

The unanimous decision [by the Supreme Court] was grounded in evidence, not ideology. The overwhelming clinical evidence is that centres like Insite save lives when it comes to some of our most vulnerable patient populations. In its ruling, the Supreme Court stated that "...the evidence indicates that a supervised injection site will decrease the risk of death and disease, and there is little or no evidence that it will have a negative impact on public safety, the Minister should generally grant an exemption". What we are seeing today seems to contradict the essence of the ruling.

Harm reduction works. This method has proven to be effective. In Australia, a report on supervised injection sites found that one site had reduced the number of overdoses, reduced the spread of HIV and hepatitis C and alleviated safety concerns related to users shooting up in public places and the availability of clean needles. The report even indicated that the site served as a gateway to addiction treatment.

Mr. Speaker, if that is not improving safety in the community, I do not know what is.

Many countries now have supervised injection sites: Australia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Spain and Switzerland, just to name a few. These sites work.

It is no wonder Montreal's director of public health recommended, in December 2011, that the city establish such a site in the greater Montreal area. He gave a number of reasons similar to the ones I just quoted concerning Australia's experience. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because they are based on conclusive data that the Conservatives and the Minister of Health have patently decided to ignore. I will quote Montreal's director of public health:

The reasons that justify implementing SIS in Montréal are very succinct: the epidemic of infections caused by HIV and HCV, and the excess mortality among IDU [injection drug users]. Cocaine use, the drug most often injected in Montréal, is a major determinant of HIV transmission, as is sharing used needles. HCV infection is also having devastating effects: 7 in 10 IDU have been exposed to the virus and its transmission does not appear to be slowing. As for excess mortality among IDU, the data on hand indicate that the problem in Montréal is alarming.

I urge the government for once to do its job in the health field. Since the Conservatives took power, we have seen the federal

government disengage from files where Canadians expect it to play a role. I am referring to the government's refusal to negotiate a new health accord with the provinces, the shortage of prescription drugs, and diluted chemotherapy treatments.

• (1120)

It is unbelievable and completely unacceptable for a bill such as this, which flies in the face of the Supreme Court ruling, to be introduced.

[English]

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear that the previous speaker, at least in theory, did not oppose scientific evidence.

I would like to ask the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert whether the NDP supports supervised drug consumption sites being approved for every drug that could be asked for, regardless of scientific evidence or community input. That is what we are asking for here, on a case-by-case basis: scientific evidence and community input. It is not some *carte blanche*, which is what the NDP is asking for.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to answer my colleague's question. Where does scientific evidence come from? From statistics and conclusive data. That is what the NDP is talking about. On your side of the House, however, you focus on ideology and not scientific evidence.

The Deputy Speaker: I remind the member that she must address her comments through the Chair and not directly to other members.

• (1125)

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I apologize, but I am very passionate about this.

The member mentioned scientific evidence. I am a scientist. I am a health care professional. You have to have collected conclusive data to be able to talk about scientific evidence. I am no better than my Canadian medical colleagues or the Supreme Court, which has examined this issue.

If the member is claiming that the NDP does not believe in science, I have to think that she did not understand my speech.

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

I know that she is a professional who truly cares about her constituents' lives and health. She shows that every day in her work as a parliamentarian.

The government seems to be confusing the notions of "scientific studies" and "community acceptance" of specific projects.

Could my colleague talk about the methods used in the 21st century to allow people to work on rehabilitation and reducing problems in our society? She touched on this briefly in her speech, but I would like to hear more.

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Ms. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his pertinent question.

As he said, this is the 21st century. Things have changed, as has our way of viewing this societal problem of drug use. The problem is there. We cannot put our heads in the sand. The NDP wants to help people who have drug addictions. We want to offer them a safe place and avoid the transmission of infectious diseases. We also want these centres to be a gateway for directing vulnerable persons to withdrawal treatment so they can receive guidance from nurses and specialized physicians. We want to offer them good health practices so they can live in dignity.

I have visited Vancouver East, and I can say that it left me devastated. What I saw there were human wrecks, people wandering the street. Is that what we want for our fellow citizens? We want a medical framework that can help these vulnerable people get out of their situation, but that is contrary to the ideology of the Conservative government.

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): It is my privilege to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

I would like to begin by firmly stating that our caucus and our party are opposed to this bill, which has now come to second reading. Our caucus feels that decisions about programs that could be beneficial to public health must be given serious consideration and must be essentially based on facts. When we talk about facts, we are of course talking about tangible, solid, quantifiable evidence, not hypotheses and qualitative methods, or indeed ideological positions.

Not so long ago, in 2011, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the InSite organization was providing essential services and should remain open under the exemption provided for in section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Once again the Conservative government is proposing a very imperfect bill, based on a very conservative and openly anti-drug ideology. To justify itself it is fearmongering about public safety.

However, at present there is only one supervised injection site operating in Canada. This is InSite, and it is in Vancouver. Since it opened, Vancouver has seen a 35% reduction in deaths by overdose. Furthermore, it has been established that InSite has brought about a decrease in crime, in communicable disease infection rates and in relapse rates for drug abusers.

This site has become such a model that big cities like Toronto and Montreal are thinking of creating their own. We in the NDP feel that decisions about programs that could be beneficial to public health have to be maintained. We must reject any intervention based on unjustified reasoning.

The position of our party is supported by three major institutions in Canada. Those institutions issued a statement regarding the former Bill C-65, which is now Bill C-2. That statement speaks of a flagrant lack of judgment. It goes even further, describing this initiative as irresponsible and unethical.

Other institutions have also spoken out against this bill as proposed by the government, including the Canadian Medical

Association and the Canadian Nurses Association. Both have criticized the approach being taken by the government.

I would also like to mention the attitude of the Conservative caucus, of our colleagues opposite. Since this morning, I have noticed that there are only seven to 11 Conservative members in the House.

● (1130)

That is evidence of blatant disinterest on their part. The members who have spoken—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I would remind the member that it is inappropriate to speak of members who are not here. I do not know if he intended to name them specifically, but I would advise him to tread lightly.

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: I understand, Mr. Speaker.

What I wanted to say, really, is that our colleagues should be here to defend their own bill, but they are not. They are not doing their job. I am sorry if that was interpreted as highlighting their absence. What is more, among those present, only three of them rose to ask questions.

On this side of the House, the hon. member for Québec quoted the Supreme Court decision, and then a member from the other side asked her an irrelevant question. Proof that the Conservatives do not listen.

Among other things, the hon. member for Churchill stated the evidence, contrasting it with ideology, but the Conservatives did not seem to get it. The hon. member for Sherbrooke very clearly described the importance of these sites that are set up safely to address the scourge the bill refers to, but his comments went unnoticed.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona asked an excellent question and made some wise observations about the importance of monitoring these activities, and the hon. member for Louis-Hébert did a great job underscoring the social impact that this represents.

Last but not least, my colleague for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert drew from her medical knowledge to explain the risks involved as well as the scientific underpinnings of the issue.

● (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly this is an impassioned debate and something that is very important to all of us. The opposition members continue to talk about it as having an ideological bent on behalf of the government, and clearly we are hearing just that from the opposition.

The Supreme Court ruled that the opinions of local communities must be considered when these sites are proposed. I ask what my colleague opposite objects to about informed decision-making processes, which the minister must go through by seeking consultation with the community and, importantly, determining where the community opinion rest on these issues. Clearly, it is a very emotional issue for a community, but I am hearing that the opposition members do not support community consultation. I wonder why not.

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Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to my hon. colleague because his question is the same as what his colleague from Langley was precisely talking about.

The point is that we are talking about a judgment coming from the Supreme Court, and it is clear because, as I said, it was read to them. They are trying to put their objective in the other way, about community. We all know what the orientation of the Conservative caucus is. The Conservatives are not for community, they are corporate, so what they are probably defending is not the health security of communities but the pockets of big corporations. That is the point.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his pertinent remarks.

We all know Conservatives always try to get what they want, and they intend to put their moral values ahead of the lives of the most vulnerable Canadians. My question is for my colleague.

Does this bill not fly in the face of the Supreme Court decision?

● (1140)

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert once again.

Yes, the hon. members of the Conservative caucus are directly challenging the Supreme Court by proposing this bill in this way. I do not believe that the highest court in the land would accept that a majority in the House of Commons with somewhat peculiar orientations can contradict what the Supreme Court has already ruled on after deep analysis and thereby jeopardize the processes or procedures that must be followed to protect the health and safety of communities by maintaining these injection sites in Vancouver. It seems to me that the Supreme Court has said that these sites should be maintained, and I do not see why the Conservatives are now putting up as many obstacles and barriers as possible to prevent them from doing their work.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise in the House and join my colleagues in the official opposition in opposing the bill. Normally I do not read a speech, but I find that it is very important on this bill to be clear that I am conveying the actual words of medical specialists, including those from my city of Edmonton, from the Canadian Medical Association, and from the Supreme Court of Canada.

In reintroducing Bill C-2, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the government is flying in the face of credible, strong evidence that safe injection sites lead to improvements in public health and public safety.

The specific objective of organized, supervised safe injection sites is widely recognized to improve health outcomes and to reduce impacts to communities where drug use is already occurring, and it is important to recognize that drug use is occurring.

Bill C-2, in imposing 24 conditions on the operation of any safe injection site and then completely giving the discretion to the minister to ignore that advice and impose her decision, rather than

relying on the opinions of scientists and medical experts, has a clear intent of rendering it inoperative.

The intent of a safe injection program is to directly address the problem of addiction to dangerous and illegal substances by mitigating the negative effects of such addictions while ensuring that addicts have access to support when they are ready to begin treatment to get off drugs, and it is important to emphasize. That is clearly the path we support, and that is the path of the safe injection sites.

Safe injection sites have been proven to do both of these things. The Canadian Medical Association has expressed deep concern about this legislation. It has pointed out that there is overwhelming clinical evidence to show that safe injection sites save lives, and it has called for such facilities to be included in a national drug strategy. According to the CMA:

Supervised injection programs are an important harm reduction strategy. Harm reduction is a central pillar in a comprehensive public health approach to disease prevention and health promotion. In a preliminary assessment based on initial review of the Bill, the CMA is deeply concerned that the proposed legislation may be creating unnecessary obstacles and burdens that could ultimately deter creation of more injection sites.

The CMA's Dr. Haggie, then president, in response to the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, said:

While for some this is an ideological issue, for physicians it's about the autonomy to make medical decisions based on evidence, and the evidence shows that supervised injection reduces the spread of infectious diseases and the incidence of overdose and death.

Dr. Stan Houston is a professor and specialist in infectious diseases at the University of Alberta, and he has extensive experience working with HIV patient care and organizations assisting such patients. Dr. Houston expressed support for the operation of safe injection sites for a number of important health-related reasons. According to Dr. Houston:

Although exact numbers are difficult to determine, hepatitis C infection rates run rampant through intravenous drug users. At one point, more than 80 per cent of those users were infected.

He has advised that due to needle exchanges and other social services provided by Streetworks, an Edmonton support program, the rates of HIV and hepatitis C have declined. According to Dr. Houston:

HIV cases are steadily going down in drug users in Edmonton. In fact that's our biggest HIV prevention success story. HIV rates are going up in other risk groups, but they are going down in injection drug users. And harm reduction practices should get a large part of the credit.

He said that by provision of a safe, supervised location for injection, staffed by medically qualified people, the probability of engaging drug users in drug treatment is substantially enhanced. He said that the preponderance of evidence from 25 peer-reviewed reports determines that programs such as InSite improve rates of further treatment for addictions.

Dr. Houston has advised me that, to his knowledge, not one case of drug overdose has occurred at InSite since 2003. That is a lot of lives saved, lives that can be redeemed and then supported to end addiction. Should that not be the health objective?

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● (1145)

Dr. Houston has pointed out to me that those who operate safe injection sites are not pro drug use. It is quite the opposite. Surely it is better to have addicts injecting drugs in a clean, secure place instead of back alleys. Quite logically, it is a preferable alternative to ensuring public safety. He has also called for more government funding of drug treatment facilities to help end their addictions.

Dr. Houston points out that the research supports his position. The obvious question, then, is this: why is the government not willing to take the advice of Canadian doctors when it comes to dealing with a serious health issue?

In September, a total of 87 organizations experienced at dealing with addictions signed a letter to the Minister of Health, urging her to not reintroduce this bill. They included a number of Edmonton organizations that assist the homeless, HIV-infected persons and addicted persons, such as the Boyle Street Community Services, the Bissell Centre, the George Spady Centre and Street Works. Their common request to the minister was for support for increased access to supervised consumption sites similar to the InSite program in Vancouver and those in other nations, including Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands, in order that lives could be saved.

These dedicated and highly respected community organizations point out that supervised consumption sites have been proven to decrease overdose, death, injury, and risk behaviours associated with HIV and hepatitis C infections; to increase access to health care for marginalized people; to save health care costs; and to decrease open drug use and publicly discarded drug use equipment, which is one of the issues communities usually raise.

I urge the minister to respond to their request to sit down with them to learn from their direct experience in dealing, on a daily basis, with people battling addictions and seek effective solutions to both assist those addicted and increase public safety.

There are obvious medical, social and psychological costs associated with a single HIV infection. If nothing else, one can appreciate the cost savings derived from preventing HIV infection. Directly because of the introduction of a needle exchange program in Edmonton, reduced rates of infection among drug addicts have been reported for both HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C, while in the same period rates have increased in other high-risk areas.

If we are truly serious about tackling the issue of drug addiction and the attendant health risks to the entire Canadian population, as parliamentarians we have an obligation to base our decisions on appropriate program or regulatory responses, sound science, and research results. Surely this should be the basis for all good public policy.

As the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network concluded from a detailed study, “many of the arguments against are ill-conceived or overstated, and are outweighed by the likely benefits of safe injection facilities”. It reports that there is an ethical imperative to at least support the trial facilities given the unacceptable harms currently experienced by drug users and the general community, and the potential for these sites to eliminate or reduce at least some of the harms. It advises that a refusal to establish these critical sites may be deemed to violate human rights obligations under

international law or potentially subject governments to negligence suits. It is important to observe what they are advising us.

It is important to observe and respect as well the unanimous ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada in favour of the continued operation of InSite and right of access to similar facilities.

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court stated in that unanimous decision:

Where, as here, a supervised injection site will decrease the risk of death and disease, and there is little or no evidence that it will have a negative impact on public safety, the Minister should generally grant an exemption.

In closing, by shutting its eyes to the evidence and seeking to put as many barriers in the way of communities opening their own safe consumption sites, the government is risking the lives and health of Canadians. Let us not forget that if it were not for the Supreme Court, InSite would have been closed.

I urge the Minister of Health to withdraw this bill and begin a serious consultation on how we can decrease addiction to illegal drugs in Canada and the attendant health and social costs.

● (1150)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member opposite quite intently. There were a couple of things that popped out during her statement. One was with regard to those who were under the use of heroin. With respect to InSite she mentioned, “when they are ready to get off the drug”. Most heroin users who I have been around in my former life are dead scared to get off that drug because of what happens in the next 72 hours.

The other thing that I did not hear in her statement was that there has not been a decrease in the use of heroin. There may be a lot of things that InSite does, but one of the things it does not do is decrease the amount of heroin used not only in Vancouver but across Canada.

Therefore, could the member speak to the reduction in heroin use and how these sites would try to do that?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the time I spent with hon. member on a previous committee.

Those are two very interesting points. On the first one, absolutely, people who are addicted to serious drugs are terrified to stop that addiction. They are addicted. That is exactly what it means, and the more serious the drug, the more serious the addiction.

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That is precisely why the medical specialists, including Dr. Houston, who is a very highly recognized doctor in Alberta, are saying that this is why we need the safe injection sites. If addicts are in a back alley taking those drugs, there are no people there saying to them they can help them get off the drug and refer them to a treatment centre. There is simply someone in that back alley saying that they can get another hit next week.

On the other matter, I do not believe I said these injection sites reduced the use of drugs. What I have said is it has reduced the incidence of related diseases.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona for her excellent speech. It was very well documented with quotes, evidence, and clear examples of the benefits that supervised injection sites can bring. These sites may not reduce the number of drug addicts, but, as we have seen, they definitely decrease the number of people who die from their addictions. This is a proven fact.

It was interesting to hear my NDP colleague talk about people who inject drugs in the streets. As a parent, I am worried about my children, because I live in a neighbourhood where children play in the streets and parks. If they fell on an infected syringe, they could get dangerously ill. The supervised injection site would ensure that there would be fewer syringes that could end up, just like that, in the hands of our children.

I do not understand why the Conservatives, who certainly must worry about the children playing in parks and streets, are not more responsive to this reality. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I am convinced the hon. member is a good father and wants to protect his children. I am convinced that any other member in this place who has children or grandchildren wants to do the best to protect them from both becoming addicted and from coming into contact with people who are addicted and might become HIV contaminated or into needles. I have found needles in my garden in my residence in Ottawa. That is deeply troubling.

This is exactly why we need to set up these safe injection sites: so there is not a possibility that anyone in our community can come in touch with contaminated items. However, there is also the chance that any of our family members, our children, could end up becoming infected with hepatitis C or HIV because we do not have those injection sites for using drugs.

We must remember that it is not simply people lying in alleys who are injecting these drugs. Drug users are across society. Everyone needs a place to go that is confidential, where they can get assistance. Clearly, evidence from around the world and Canada says that drug injection sites are the best mechanism to reduce disease and to get people off drugs.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak today to oppose Bill C-2,

An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. As you are aware, this bill had been introduced as Bill C-65 at the end of the previous parliamentary session. It has now been reintroduced in its current form, as Bill C-2.

We are the only party to comment on the subject today. The NDP is the only party standing up to give a voice to the least fortunate in our society.

The Conservative government has missed a fine opportunity. It should have taken advantage of the House prorogation to consign this bill to oblivion. It is a thinly veiled attempt to stop supervised injection sites from operating, in direct defiance of a Supreme Court ruling on these sites.

The bill sets out a lengthy and arduous list of criteria that supervised injection sites would have to meet before the minister would grant them an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. These criteria will make it much harder for organizations to open supervised injection sites in Canada.

For new supervised injection sites, preparing the application would be so onerous that it would likely deter applicants from opening such a site. The department's representatives have told us that if an applicant were to accidentally forget to include any detail, the application would automatically be refused. Even if all the required documents were included with the application, and it has the full support of the community, the minister would still be able to refuse the application.

If the bill is passed, new applications will have to include the following: scientific evidence demonstrating a medical benefit; a letter from the ministers responsible for public health and safety, municipal governments, local police chiefs and senior public health officials; information about infectious diseases and overdoses related to the use of illicit substances; a description of the drug treatment services available at the public safety site; a description of the potential impact of the site on public safety; a description of the measures that would be taken to minimize the divergence of controlled substances; information on loitering in a public place that may be related to certain activities involving illicit substances, drug trafficking and crime in the vicinity of the site at the time of the application; a report of the consultations held with a broad range of community groups from the municipality, including copies of all written submissions received and a description of the steps that would be taken to address any relevant concerns.

Needless to say, drug addicts could die 15 times in that timeframe.

Some requests may also take forever for no good reason, which means groups could be kept waiting for months or even years. The bill mentions there will be a 90-day public consultation period when a group requests an exemption, but it does say how long it could take for Health Canada to process a request, or for the minister to reach a decision.

The bill also lays out principles that the minister will have to consider before accepting a request. These principles, stated in section 5, essentially list all reasons why a request could be rejected. I quote:

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The Minister may only grant an exemption for a medical purpose under subsection (2) to allow certain activities to take place at a supervised consumption site in exceptional circumstances and after having considered the following principles:

- (a) illicit substances may have serious health effects;
- (b) adulterated controlled substances may pose health risks;
- (c) the risks of overdose are inherent to the use of certain illicit substances;
- (d) strict controls are required, given the inherent health risks associated with controlled substances that may alter mental processes;
- (e) organized crime profits from the use of illicit substances; and
- (f) criminal activity often results from the use of illicit substances.

I am not sure what kind of circus the Conservatives are living in, but they seem to act as if we were still in the 20th century, rather than fully in the 13th year of the 21st century.

I encourage them to open their eyes, and to see that drugs have infiltrated communities all across the country. I encourage them to put on new glasses, and to realize that Canada exports a lot of drugs, mainly to the U.S.

• (1200)

To back up that statement, I would like to quote from an article by Tom Godfrey published on the Canoe network on January 30, 2012. He said:

Canada has joined Colombia as a leading exporter of synthetic or designer drugs, flooding the global market on an almost unprecedented scale, police say. The RCMP have seized tonnes of illicit synthetic drugs that include Ecstasy and methamphetamine being shipped abroad after being “cooked” in make-shift labs in apartments, homes and businesses in the GTA.

Police are now seizing more chemicals and synthetic drugs, which they say is favoured by young people, at Canadian border checks rather than the traditional cocaine, heroin or hashish that officers call drugs of “a last generation”.

According to a Radio-Canada report broadcast on November 8, 2013, Colorado was about to legalize the free consumption of marijuana for all adults over 21. This is a North American first, and it is happening in a country that has always officially waged war on drugs, including cannabis. The state is unmistakably planning to legalize it, not decriminalize it. We are talking about recreational marijuana use, not medical use. This is unique, and Uruguay and Washington state will soon be doing it too.

Before wrapping up, I would like to talk about an experience I had. I was living with my two daughters in an apartment with a back alley. I frequently found needles in that alley. When the kids found needles, they gave them to us. That is why I would really have appreciated having a place in the community that I could have referred people to when they came to shoot up behind my apartment building.

When people are sick, they get care. When people are using drugs, they are sick and need care. That is why specialized care has been made available to help these people get the unique care they need. That is what Vancouver's InSite provides.

This is a deeply flawed bill based on anti-drug ideology and false fears for public safety. This is the latest attempt to rally the Conservative base. The Conservatives' “Keep heroin out of our backyards” campaign, launched just hours after Bill C-2 was introduced in Parliament, makes that very clear. That is what I call turning a blind eye.

This bill will make it practically impossible to open safe injection sites, which will put heroin back in our neighbourhoods. The Conservative government is increasing barriers to providing a service to those in need in a safe place, rather than in an alley where needles can be found by young children. There are many risks associated with that.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member opposite that heroin is not the only drug that is injected with a needle. Certainly those needles that she finds could be from a drug other than heroin.

There are some other things I would like to bring forward before my question.

Injection sites do not provide drugs to those who are getting high. In fact, anyone who buys any form of heroin has to buy it from a street dealer, and that street dealer is promoting organized crime because that is the only place it comes from.

With that in mind, it seems to me as though what we are trying to do as a government is to ensure that communities have an input into what they want. What I understand from the member is that the intent of the NDP is to oppose this bill from the perspective that its members do not believe that a consultation needs to take place. Furthermore, given the comments from the member who spoke previously, are they insinuating as well that heroin could be dispensed from an injection site?

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, what is important about injection sites is that they provide needles with which drug users can inject the drugs they have brought with them themselves. After the needles are used, they are not thrown on the ground. This protects our children. It is extremely important. As I said in my speech, I have found needles in the street. It is important that this does not happen.

These people no longer have enough sense of responsibility not to throw needles in the streets. They do not want to be caught with a used needle. It is thus very important to promote the creation of these sites across Canada. Denis Coderre wrote an article that supports my position. He says that he is in favour of supervised injection sites. Drugs are a problem. We cannot just turn a blind eye. The problem is there and we have to take action to help those affected.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague what she thinks about the Conservatives, who pride themselves on showing no mercy to anybody who is not one of their own. They stand and talk about being tough on crime and how much they oppose illegal drugs, yet they tiptoe around the disgrace in Toronto of Rob Ford, a man who promotes his ties to gangs, a man who takes illegal drugs, a man who takes crack. We do not hear anyone on the Conservative side saying that the mayor of one of the largest cities in North America is an absolute disgrace and needs to resign.

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Meanwhile, they want to go after something that has been examined by medical authorities across North America and that has been supported by the Supreme Court. They will do fundraising efforts on that.

I would ask my hon. colleague why she thinks they are not doing fundraising letters on Rob Ford, the crack mayor who has disgraced North America? Why are they not saying that they are going to be tough on him? He is one of their friends. He is one of their own. They will protect their own, no matter what kind of criminal activity they are involved in.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague on this.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member, I too think that if the government were this tough on people like Mr. Ford, he would no longer be where he is. The Conservatives are tougher on petty criminals and ordinary people, those who are addicted to drugs and who throw their used needles everywhere.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Kootenay—Columbia asked a question earlier on with respect to why we would not allow the community to make decisions based upon its interpretation of the bill.

If we look at InSite in Vancouver, we see that it was set up through community consultation with health care professionals and the police. I know the member is a former RCMP officer. It was set up in consultation with the community, yet the Conservatives wanted to shut it down in 2008.

How would my colleague reply to that?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I have rarely seen a bill that contains so many rules and that requires that such a strong case be made when an application is submitted. It is unbelievable. All this is being done to deter supervised injection sites from being opened. This is an ideological position. The Conservatives do not want supervised injection sites because injection means drugs. However, drugs are everywhere. We cannot ignore that fact. They are even in small towns. Everyone knows it. Many people have children and friends who struggle with this problem. Drugs are everywhere. We have to help people help themselves and help ease their suffering.

• (1210)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-2 today because it is a piece of legislation that has to be called out. It has to be exposed. We have to tell the Canadian people what is really going on in the Parliament of Canada and what is driving and motivating the type of legislation being put forward by the Conservative Party, the ruling party.

I should say at the outset that Bill C-2, the bill that is supposedly entitled “an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act”, should really be called “an act to raise money through fearmongering act”, because within hours of Bill C-2 being tabled in the House of Commons, a blitz, a flurry, of fundraising letters went out across the country under the title “Keep heroin out of our backyards”.

Imagine the cynicism of introducing legislation that is not based on evidence, reason, logic, science, or public health. Not one of those factors enters into this whatsoever. The fact is, the Conservatives are running out of red meat to throw to their base. They do not have the gun registry to milk anymore. I am amazed that they killed the goose that laid the golden egg on the gun registry. That used to be how they bankrolled the whole darn party, really, their war room and everything.

The hon. member across is probably wanting to say that we do not have the Canadian Wheat Board to slap around anymore. No, the Conservatives cannot milk that one anymore either. That was a good one. They milked that one for years, calling it marketing freedom. I always called it the freedom to sell grain for less.

We should label these bills a little more honesty, really. The keep heroin out of our backyards fundraising campaign started just hours after the bill was tabled. Sometimes it is the same minute that the bill is tabled that the fundraising letters start blitzing out. It makes us wonder who is paying for some of the mailing, because I know a lot of this messaging is paid for by the taxpayer.

In my own riding, 10 Conservative members of Parliament have been carpet bombing my riding with their propaganda and their literature, followed up immediately with a fundraising letter from the party. The Conservatives plant the seed on the taxpayer's dime, putting hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of letters into my riding on a regular basis, and then they pay for the postage stamp for the follow-up letter that asks for money based on the taxpayer-funded literature that just arrived.

Is that legal? I do not think it is. I think it is an abuse. At the very least, it is an abuse.

When the Prime Minister's Office is being investigated for high crimes and misdemeanours, let us summarize some of the abuse of privileges, mailing privileges being one. With the Prime Minister's Office being investigated for bribery, breach of trust, fraud, and obstruction of justice, we could add contempt of Parliament to that sordid list. We could add abusing the taxpayers' dollars by misusing the mailing privileges of members of Parliament to another one.

But I digress. I want to speak to the substance of the bill in a serious way.

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I might be one of the few people in the House who have actually toured the InSite safe injection site in Vancouver, although I know quite a few of our NDP members have, in fact. I doubt that very many members on the Conservative side ever have, because they would not be able to say with a straight face that there is any evidence in the way they have been arguing in the keeping heroin out of our backyard fundraising drive. That is because if they did canvass the community of the Downtown Eastside, they would find it is overwhelmingly supportive. If they canvassed ordinary Vancouverites, they would find the site is overwhelmingly supported. There is no NIMBY, not in my backyard, associated with InSite, yet we have a whole piece of legislation that is crafted specifically to undermine the Supreme Court ruling and shut down one public health facility in downtown Vancouver. It is another spurious, wasteful use of the taxpayer's dime to have Parliament seized of the issue in order to get revenge for the Conservatives losing a Supreme Court ruling on the veracity, the use, and the efficacy of the InSite safe injection site in downtown Vancouver.

● (1215)

One of the problems is that the mindset of the Conservatives is that substance abuse and addiction are somehow a criminal justice issue. They are not. They are health issues and they should be treated as public health concerns.

One of the other problems that I do not think a lot of the people who introduced this bill realize is that if we are going to help someone who has a substance or addiction problem, we need to reach them and have the supports available and concentrated for when that person is ready.

I had an example in my own office recently. My riding has some serious issues, not unlike the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. There was a young sex trade worker who worked up and down the street on Sargent Avenue, where my office is. One time, she came into our office, clearly jangled on what we believe was crack cocaine. She wanted to make a change to her life. She said she had had it and she wanted to get off the streets. She wanted help and she wanted to clean up.

We got on the phone to try to help her, but we could not find a bed for her. We could not find any place to refer her. We cannot tell addicts that we are glad they want to clean up, but to come back in six weeks when we will have a bed for them. It does not work that way.

One of the magic things about InSite is the OnSite, which is eight floors above. There are rooms. They are clean, safe, detox-assisted rooms where an addict can literally be using the safe injection site on the main floor one minute, speak to a counsellor or social worker that very moment and then be referred to the detox centre, where they dry out in the rehabilitation program in the same building at the same time.

The success rate is evident. The empirical evidence exists that InSite saves lives and helps people get off drugs, because we can have access to them to offer the services that they need to clean up their lives. Unlike the situation with the woman in Winnipeg, where there was no room available. InSite/OnSite/apartment hotel services are a whole campus of support mechanisms, concentrated right where they are needed.

In this fearmongering and fundraising campaign about keeping heroin out of our backyards, one of the pieces of literature that the Conservatives are bombing into my riding, misusing their MPs' mailing privileges, has a picture of a guy sneaking in a bedroom window with a knife. It is as if this junkie is going to kill us in the night with his knife if we do not vote Conservative and only the Conservatives can help protect us from the junkie who is going to creep into our bedroom windows. That is how cynical this messaging is. They build up a straw man and then try to convince people that this straw man is going to hurt them, and say that the Conservative Party is the only one that can protect them from this imaginary straw man.

That is what the Conservatives are doing with this legislation. They are trying to imply that if the bill does not pass and if we do not somehow overturn the outcome of the Supreme Court ruling, we are going to have junkies in our backyards shooting up heroin. That is really what the message is when we strip it down to its actual substance. The Supreme Court ruling showed great wisdom and it is a shame that it had to go that far.

InSite opened in 2003 and started showing improvements immediately. There used to be 12 people a year dying from an overdose in the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. That has changed dramatically. Communicable diseases are way down in terms of people using dirty needles and sharing hepatitis C, or even worse, HIV-AIDS. These things are being treated with a common sense approach.

People were supportive. The Supreme Court of Canada was supportive. The Conservatives are sore losers, so they are again abusing the arbitrary and absolute power that they have by not showing any respect for Parliament to ram this through. At least show some respect for the Supreme Court of Canada, which has spoken recently on this subject.

Bill C-2 should go down in flames. The Conservatives should apologize for the fundraising campaign where they are trying to milk the public by fearmongering.

● (1220)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member. I think he knows and is refusing to admit that in my riding, I received fundraising letters from the NDP, including the late Jack Layton, that came in government envelopes, obviously paid for by the taxpayers. I know the member supported that blatant misuse of taxpayer dollars. Would he like to see that evidence? I have saved it.

For my second question, and I am not sure that I totally disagree with the member, if heroin addiction is, in fact, a health matter and not something that should be a legislative matter, why are he and his party putting forward legislation against salt? Why is the NDP so soft on crime, soft on heroin and tough on potato chips?

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Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague would like to see a copy of some of the literature that his colleagues are bombarding my riding with. Here is one that is signed by 10 individual members of Parliament, all from Manitoba, who I guess are pooling their mailing privileges, which I thought was something we did away with. I thought the Speaker and the Board of Internal Economy prohibited this.

I hope my colleague is listening. The worst thing about it is that New Democrats believe that they are mining the Revenue Canada database to get this information. I will give an example.

A guy who works in my office received one of these letters in his mother's name. His mother only lived in his house for four months before she passed away. He filed her taxes from that address just once, and guess what? She got a personalized letter from the Conservative Party in her name at that address. Nobody in the Conservative Party should have known that Mrs. Morrison passed away living on Dominion Street. No one knew she was in that house. She was only there the last four months she was alive. How did the Conservatives find out?

Another one went to the Theule family. How did the Conservatives know? When anybody turns 18, they can change the personalized letter. It says, "Dear Gerrit and Jennifer". Gerrit just turned 18. How do they know these things? They are misusing their mailing privileges by bombarding my riding under the signatures of Vic Toews, Merv Tweed, and eight others.

An hon. member: There is a crook.

Mr. Pat Martin: The only guy that has ever been convicted of electoral fraud in the Parliament of Canada is writing letters to my constituents on Government of Canada stationery and postage. It is wrong.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. If members want to carry on a conversation about this, they can do so outside the chamber.

I would also remind all hon. members that questions and comments ought to relate to the matter that is before the House.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member for Winnipeg Centre; his articulate and heartfelt speech focused on issues that are dear to Canadians. The benefits of supervised injection sites and their positive impact on communities are known across the world.

The Conservatives have launched a campaign with the slogan "keep heroin out of our backyards". Furthermore, it does not take an MBA or a medical background to see that, with Bill C-2, the Conservatives are doing everything they can, not only to stop new supervised injection sites from opening, but also to shut down the Vancouver site.

Would this not bring heroin back to our doorstep, our parks and our neighbourhoods?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her particular insight into this situation. Excuse the pun. I know that as a medical practitioner, she has first-hand experience in observing ways of treating addiction that show results and ways that do not. New Democrats made the distinction early on in our remarks that addiction and substance abuse is a health issue and should be treated as such, not a criminal justice issue.

Even Conrad Black, who I usually do not pay a lot of attention to, said that when he was serving time in an American prison for his fraud charges, 80% of the prisoners he was in there with did not belong in jail; they belonged in a rehabilitation or detox centre for their substance abuse issues. He said it was how they got there, they were not being treated there and they would be back in again because their health issues would still be a factor.

• (1225)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say I am very glad to be rising to speak to the bill, but I am speaking with a sense of sadness. This is the level to which the current government is descending in terms of its misrepresentation of facts, its willingness to leave people basically out on the streets to die and of course to play political games, attacking the Supreme Court, attacking the peer-reviewed medical communities and attacking medical authorities so it can make a few bucks for its Conservative war machine.

Twenty-five years ago, I spent a number of years working on the streets of the east end of Toronto in Riverdale. Twenty-five years later, my oldest daughter is back in the east end of Toronto working with the homeless. We sit down and talk. She was born in a house that we were running, taking in men coming out of prison and taking in addicts. Having a child in that house did marvels for restoring a sense of community and of helping to heal people. We have had people who came through that house who went on to live wonderful lives. I think of my dear friend Pierre, a lifelong heroin addict whom we managed to get out of prison and who ended up becoming the adopted grandfather of my children. He lived with us until he died in his 70s. That would not have been possible if there had not been opportunities in place to get him off the streets.

Twenty-five years later, my daughter is back working on the streets of Toronto. I would like to say that things are better, but they are not. Things have deteriorated, as far as I can see. We talk about the causes. Of course, many of the causes are sitting over on the front bench of the Conservative Party. They are all the former Mike Harris thugs, who are now in the House of Commons, who stripped social housing programs. Previously we could get men and women off the streets and into subsidized housing, but that is disappearing, particularly in Toronto centre, where we see more and more condos going up and more and more of the poor being put out onto the streets. We see the lack of health supports for these people on the streets. I talk with my daughter about the issue of addiction and what she faces with the people coming through.

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In contrast to the Conservative Party and its dumbed-down attack machine that likes to show people the junkie sneaking through the child's bedroom window so they will give them some money so that the Prime Minister, whose office is under investigation for all manner of criminal activities, can defend them, what we see with junkies and addicts is a cross-section of society. What we are here to discuss today is not ideology. We are here to discuss the Supreme Court, to discuss the support of the Canadian Medical Association and peer-reviewed studies. This is on our side of the House. On their side is a cynical attempt to make money off the Conservative base with their expression "keep heroin out of our backyards".

If we look at the evidence, we find that if we do not have a way of dealing with these street drugs, it will be in our backyards. When it is pushed underground, that is where we see the crime and the break-ins, and this is where we see the long-term effects. It is not just the overdoses and the deaths, but the hepatitis, HIV, and the other blood-related diseases that end up destroying people, sometimes who sober up and then many years later start to die from liver ailments and other problems that have been caused because they were not dealt with properly when they were on the street.

I would like to say this for the Conservatives who live in this fairy bubble that it is the 1950s: the drugs are in their communities. It is the fentanyl patches that young people are getting caught up in. It is the OxyContin addictions that went across our communities when they were over-prescribed by the medical authorities. It is the meth. These are drugs that are cutting across all manner of society. As my hon. colleague from Winnipeg Centre said, when you see the people who ask, who try to break the cycle of addiction, try getting them a bed in rehab, try getting them the support they need. If it is not there, the cycle becomes worse, and it becomes a cycle of crime.

What we need to do here is to put this in context. The Supreme Court called on the current government and laid down very clear rules for when there would be an injection site.

I personally have many problems with anyone using heroin under any circumstance. I find it is an anathema. However, what was agreed upon was that there had to be a way of constraining this to limit the damage. Therefore it is done with the community. It is done with proper oversight. It is done with support so that somehow these people can get off the addictions.

• (1230)

As they say in the 12-step program, and I spent many days at Alcoholics Anonymous with the men coming out of prison, to get them sobered up, there but for the grace of God go I. People who find themselves in this situation are not born to be criminals. They have medical problems that hit them, and it takes over their lives.

I will also say, having dealt with the Toronto police 25 years ago, and in talking with my daughter, who deals with the Toronto police today, that too often the police in Toronto, and in other cities as well, are the front line social and health care workers. They are the ones dealing with people who are in this crisis. It is a waste of their resources and a waste of our resources.

Do I believe that heroin needs to be stopped on the streets? I would do anything to stop heroin on the streets. However, to simply turn it into a fundraising tactic for the Conservative base is a

complete abdication of the role of Parliament, which is to find out the best ways to limit the damage and start moving toward constructive solutions so that we can bring people out of the depths of addiction.

I would like to point out that my colleagues in the Conservative Party pride themselves on their lack of mercy. It seems to be their hallmark. They have zero tolerance for anyone. They love throwing people in jail. They love standing up on the back bench on any given day railing against the little punk who took the old lady's purse. However, when it comes to defending their own, oh my God, they have arms so wide they could fit around Rob Ford. That is how much they are willing to defend their own.

Here we have one of their close friends, a man who is a thug, who has disgraced a public office in this country and around the world, who has turned our nation into a laughingstock with his egregious use of crack cocaine, of all things, who was hanging out with drug dealers and criminal elements, and who is under investigation by the Toronto police.

We do not hear a peep out of anybody on that back bench. Oh, no, he is one of theirs. He is one of their pals. When we have the mayor of Toronto, the fourth-largest city in North America, the economic engine of Ontario, a mayor who has turned city hall into something that looks like a Hells Angels hangout, we hear nothing from over there. Oh, no, he is one of their boys.

The Prime Minister said that he was slightly concerned. The Minister of Health, who is helping to rally the troops to go after the poor addicts in downtown Vancouver, has so much concern for Rob Ford. Oh, my God. Then the Minister of Finance was tearing up about this thug. Poor little Robbie; he is one of our boys.

The Conservatives have no mercy for anybody else, but when it is one of theirs, like those in their office, like their senators under investigation for breach of trust, under investigation for fraud and bribery, they say that the Prime Minister cannot be held accountable; everybody else is accountable.

When we ask the Conservatives questions, we have to ask the Rob Ford kind of question: "Are you smoking crack right now? Did you smoke crack yesterday at three o'clock?"

You see how the Conservatives cannot stand up and be accountable.

This bill being brought forward by the government is an attack on the Supreme Court. It is an attack on attempts to save lives. It is being done not because the Conservatives really care about what happens to the junkies in downtown Montreal or Vancouver. It is so they can make a few bucks from their base. That is as dismal a political standard as I have ever seen in this country.

We will continue to stand up for smart policies, not dumbed-down policies. We will continue to oppose the government. It is mired in corruption and mired in criminal activity and would prefer to hang out with its Conservative gang members while going after victims on the street.

Government Orders

• (1235)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member intently. I would like to maybe educate him a little bit with regard to the use of heroin in my three years of drug work.

First, when people buy heroin, they trust the dealer they are getting it from. They trust that the percentage of heroin they are getting is actually not going to harm them. They know how much they need to take to get high.

The fact of the matter is that dealers, from time to time, like to play a game. They like to increase the amount of heroin in the point, just to watch someone overdose. I have seen that personally. It is not fun by any stretch of the imagination. I have watched people inject into places they should not be injecting into. The fact of the matter is that an injection site is not going to solve that. Everyone should know that.

My question to the member is this: if he is so intent on having injection sites to ensure that people inject safely, should we also ensure that the heroin is there so the amount these people can inject is controlled? What does the member have to say about that?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I know a fair bit about heroin overdoses, having dealt with them on the streets of Toronto.

I would say that my hon. colleague, with all due respect, misrepresents or maybe misunderstands. The dealers do not try to get a kick out of watching someone overdose. What happens is that when new heroin comes out on the street that is of higher quality than is expected, that is when overdoses happen.

What my hon. colleague is suggesting as a medical solution is to let them go and die in an alleyway. That is the Conservatives' solution. What about the people on the fentanyl patch? We have seen those addictions. My hon. colleague is saying to let them go die in an alleyway.

What the Supreme Court and the medical authorities are saying is that this is happening now. That is the Conservatives' position: let them go die in an alleyway. It is happening now.

What we have seen in Vancouver is that by going into a safe site, medical authorities can watch them. I notice that on the other side nobody has talked about the fact that in Vancouver, there have been fewer deaths. The number of deaths has dropped substantially. However, they would rather play to their Conservative base and say, "let the junkies die in the alleyway".

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting in this House for the last year watching the Senate scandal unfold. I hear the Prime Minister speak every single day saying that the facts are crystal clear. If the facts are so clear, why do we keep asking the questions?

This is like when one tells their kids to clean their rooms. Six weeks later, we tell them to clean up their rooms. The fact is, the room has not been cleaned, and that is why we keep telling the kids to clean up their rooms.

The facts are very clear. The facts are on the side of researchers, public safety officials, and health officials. They see a benefit in having InSite in various communities.

Is this bill based on ideology or facts?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this is an attempt to undermine the work of the Supreme Court, which laid out a clear test for what should be an InSite site. Our colleagues on the other side would misrepresent the facts so that they can make some bucks off their base.

I look at a government that promised that it would bring ethical standards. What do I see? I see the unprecedented situation of an RCMP investigation into the office of the Prime Minister. I saw 80 pages yesterday of police testimony that said again and again that it was the office of the Prime Minister that was interfering with an audit in the Senate. This audit was about the defrauding of the taxpayers of the country. Senator Gerstein, Senator Olsen, Senator Tkachuk, Pat Rogers, and Benjamin Perrin, who is the personal lawyer for the Prime Minister, were involved. Their names are there.

We are talking about attempting to whitewash fraud against the taxpayers. This is the Conservatives' idea of good representation. It is criminal behaviour.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to make a brief comment. It is curious that no Conservatives decided to rise to debate this bill. Is it because they realized that it is indefensible? I wonder why they decided to remain silent. I hope that one of my hon. colleagues on the other side of this House will be able to answer this question. I still have a few nagging doubts, though, because they do not have many arguments to use to defend their position.

That being said, this issue of public safety must go much further. We must ask ourselves some questions here: what is a government? What is a government for? What is the purpose of the Parliament that I am part of right now?

Its purpose is to serve Canadians. Its purpose is to help vulnerable people who unfortunately have not been as lucky as we have been.

What is a government for? It must do what it can to help the people who have unfortunately fallen into the vicious cycle of drugs at some point in their life. You can try to justify the situation or blame it on a number of things, but the fact is that this situation must be resolved and it is through initiatives of this kind that a government ensures that the most vulnerable people are able to recover.

A number of members have been in this House longer than I have, and I would have hoped for better from them. Why did we become members of Parliament? It is because fundamentally, deep in our hearts, we thought that we could hold out a helping hand to people in dreadful situations and that we could help them out. I am sorry, and far be it from me to lecture my colleagues about morality, but I believe a good member of Parliament must know the difference between the common good and his or her own personal opinions.

Every person in this House has personal opinions. We have opinions about abortion—we know, that debate is not going to be reopened—and about this kind of situation, the drug situation. That is okay. That is good. That is what makes us human beings.

Government Orders

We have values, principles and personal opinions. However, we are here as representatives of the people, and we make up a House of Commons. We do say “commons”, and I would like to point out that in the past the House was for the common people, the people representing the people. We are here today because we are the representatives of the people. Our values and our personal opinions are not any more important than the common good.

Working towards the common good begins precisely by recognizing that supervised injection sites not only contribute to public safety and help ensure that children, women and families are safer, but also help people overcome completely intolerable situations.

Why would the government, whose fundamental role is to ensure the safety of Canadians, while at the same time helping vulnerable people in extremely difficult situations, refuse to take on this role? I cannot express how disappointed I am right now that I have to make this speech to say that the public safety of Canadians is more important than mere political ideologies.

The Conservatives are trying to make us believe that supervised injection sites, which are internationally recognized as being beneficial to public safety for having reduced the number of deaths and crime rates, will not benefit Canadians. I am truly disappointed.

We know that the minister decided to give preliminary authorization to InSite on a trial basis.

• (1245)

Why would the minister want to give this kind of exemption if not to make it possible to conduct impact studies, to see if it works? Now that we know that this site has reduced the crime rate and the number of deaths, in addition to making the streets safer, why is it not being granted a second exemption?

The inherent role of Parliament is to provide assistance to vulnerable people. People who used InSite were twice as likely to enrol in a detox program and seek help than those who were left out in the street.

The Supreme Court stated, and I quote:

In accordance with the *Charter*, the Minister must consider whether denying an exemption would cause deprivations of life and security of the person that are not in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

I talked about fundamental justice at the beginning of my speech. Members of Parliament have an inherent duty to ensure that people get help. In 2008, Health Canada published a report indicating that since 2006, InSite had intervened in 336 overdoses and there were no deaths. This means that that site is saving the lives of Canadians. I cannot believe that a Conservative member can stand here today and say that this kind of site has no purpose. If it saves just one life, this kind of site has a purpose. Unfortunately, the government cannot say that this is not in the interest of Canadians. The government has a role to play in saving lives, making our streets safer and helping vulnerable people get by. It should not be standing in the way.

Based on observations made six weeks before and 12 weeks after InSite opened, the number of people injecting drugs in public had decreased. All the municipalities agree that this kind of site reduces crime. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug

Addiction has shown that injection sites reach out to vulnerable groups, are accepted by all communities and help improve the health of drug users and even reduce drug use among frequent users.

According to the Health Canada report, people who used InSite services were twice as likely to seek help and enrol in a detox program. I am repeating this because it is very important. This site has actually decreased drug use. Is that not what the Conservatives want—to reduce crime, make our streets safer, and most of all, decrease drug use? These sites exist all over the world and experts everywhere approve.

For example, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* have all said that these types of sites have positive outcomes. The Supreme Court also said that these sites are in the inherent interest of Canadians' security of the person and life.

I urge the Conservatives to understand that the role of Parliament is not to champion an ideology, but to open its heart to Canadians and help them. If we save even one life, the government cannot say that these sites are useless and serve no purpose. Canadian lives have been saved.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across the way. I very much appreciate her passion.

When I was in college, I worked at a free clinic in downtown Toronto, and we dealt with everything from prostitutes who were beaten up and needed stitching, et cetera, to many types of addictions. Heroin is not the only addiction that causes physical and social problems. There are, of course, alcoholics and sex or gambling addicts. There are many other types of addictions.

If the NDP wants to go toward free clinics for injecting heroin for addicts and perhaps toward sex clinics and gambling clinics, or maybe for alcoholics there would be a place to get some free drinks, which I think we tried in the past, if the NDP wants to provide better access to those kinds of things, we think the community should have a say. That is the democratic way. Why is the NDP so soft on crime, so soft on heroin, and so tough on potato chips?

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I am truly saddened to have to reply to such an absurd question. As I just said, the inherent role of a government is to help people. Experts agree that this type of site has merit, works and helps people with a heroin addiction as well as other problems. We know that people who take drugs often have other problems. They have psychological or mental health problems. Experts say that these sites have been proven to save lives. People have been saved from the sort of lifestyle that goes with drug addiction and many types of problems. These people have gone to get help and their lives have been saved. I am disappointed to hear the member say that we are soft on crime and tough on potato chips. That is really ridiculous. Lives have been saved. I am disappointed to hear the minister say that we are soft on crime. Lives have been saved. To say that the NDP is soft on crime is completely absurd. We are talking about saving lives. We are not talking about criminals, we are talking about people with health issues. Lives have been saved and we must remember that. I am sorry, but the Conservative ideology should not stand in the way of saving lives.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. I also listened to the hon. member for Cambridge, and all I can say is, “God help us”. With that sort of attitude, we are in serious trouble. When a member of the government, like the one who just spoke, tells us that the problem comes from the fact that we are soft on crime, it makes an extremely important point. It shows that this government has absolutely no sympathy for those who are struggling with addictions. Its response is basically to say that if people have that problem, then it is their own fault and the government is not going to do anything to help. This government is not capable of showing compassion for those less fortunate than us. I would like to ask my NDP colleague this question: how can we hope to change such an attitude?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, if I knew, I would make sure that the Conservatives could see all the shoddy work they have done over the years and all the work that still needs to be done and has needed to be done for a long time.

I would like to say that all the municipalities, such as Montreal and Vancouver, agree that this type of site will help people. Contrary to what my colleague might say, these people are not necessarily less fortunate; they likely have mental health problems. These people are suffering from depression and need help. The government's role is to help these people, not criminalize them. The government should not be saying that, unfortunately, it is people's own fault if they take drugs. As I was saying, according to a 2006 report, over 2,100 people sought help at InSite over the course of a year and managed to overcome their addiction. The government cannot divest itself of its responsibility to help people. We are here to save lives. Unfortunately, on the government side, no member has risen to defend his or her position. That is because it is indefensible.

• (1255)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say how shameful it is that the Conservatives are not standing up to take part in the debate on Bill C-2. As my colleague just pointed out, their position is indefensible.

This is an important debate about saving lives by giving people in need access to care and referrals to drug treatment options. This debate is about a very important public health and public safety issue: setting up supervised injection sites.

I would like to begin my speech with some quotes from a feasibility study for such a site in Montreal. The study was conducted in 2011 by the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal. The tone and the word choices paint a very accurate picture of what supervised injection sites do:

Supervised injection services are medical and nursing services provided in response to addiction, which is a disease. In countries where these services are legal, they are offered in places where injection drug users can inject drugs they bring in themselves in a clean and safe environment, under the supervision of qualified medical, nursing and psychosocial staff.

What are the goals of these sites? I quote:

...to help prevent diseases and deaths among people who inject drugs, and to reduce social inequalities in health that affect one of society's most vulnerable groups.

Earlier, members talked about compassion and helping people who need resources and tools. That is what the government should be doing, but the Conservatives either do not understand or they have decided to wash their hands of the whole thing.

Anyone who wants to understand what supervised injection sites do has to understand what drug addiction is and what patients suffering from the disease go through. It just so happens that drug addicts consume substances deemed illegal, but they are still people with a disease. More than anything else, they need help.

Any government that cannot understand that basic need for care and help cannot create public health legislation. Unfortunately, that is what is happening now with Bill C-2.

This bill is the result of the Conservatives' ideological war against drug addicts. It is not based on science or facts, but rather on ignorance and fear. Earlier we were accused of being soft on crime and soft on heroin. On the contrary, supervised injection sites provide a safe, secure and supervised place for users, while the Conservatives would rather send all these people into the streets, with no resources and without any chance of being referred to health care professionals.

The New Democrats cannot help but be opposed to this witch hunt. This is not the Middle Ages. This is a modern, advanced society with experts who can help the people who need help.

The Conservatives' war on the InSite supervised injection site in Vancouver and others has been going on for years. In 2003 InSite received an exemption to operate for medical and scientific purposes under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. More than 30 scientific studies have confirmed that InSite has positive effects on patients and public health.

In Europe and Australia, 70 similar injection sites have seen the same positive results. I do not know what other evidence the Conservatives need. There have been 30 scientific studies on 70 sites around the world.

Government Orders

In 2008, when the site had been operating successfully for five years, the Conservative government set out on a crusade against InSite. It refused to renew the site's exemption and spent thousands of dollars in court, but every court ruled in favour of the medical centre.

The B.C. Supreme Court, the B.C. Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada all said that the centre should remain open. The Supreme Court was very clear: the minister's decision to close InSite violated the charter rights of the centre's clients. Here is what the court had to say about the decision:

It is arbitrary, undermining the very purposes of the *CDSA*, which include public health and safety.

Who is soft on crime? I do not think those of us on this side of the House are. This quote was from the Supreme Court of Canada.

● (1300)

With Bill C-2, the government sets out the new criteria to establish a supervised injection site. Some of these criteria are reasonable, but others seem to indicate that the government will use this legislation to close such sites. Moreover, the sheer number of criteria is enough to deter people from launching a project before they even begin. The number of criteria is really high.

These criteria are basically new ammunition for the Conservatives' ideological war against addicts. This is also a way to shape people's minds through fear. Bill C-2 requires proof of the project's acceptability to the community. That is fine. However, this will have to be done with all the necessary medical and psychosocial information. When people are well informed, they support such initiatives.

However, I suspect that the government will once again resort to ignorance and fear, rather than education and public health. How can we trust it when it has been fighting for years to close InSite, a decision that flies in the face of the Supreme Court's position? Did the government even read the scientific studies confirming the results achieved with these supervised injection sites? People who use these sites are almost twice as likely to enter a detox program.

There is a significant drop in the number of discarded needles on the streets. As I mentioned, there are fewer people shooting up on the streets. There is less crime and less violence. Consequently, there should be less fear about the Conservatives' claims whenever they talk about heroin on the streets.

The drop in needle sharing reduces the transmission of HIV-AIDS. More importantly, supervised injection sites help improve the health of people who use them and lower the number of overdose deaths. Even though people's lives are at stake and studies show that crime decreases, the Conservatives deny this and only talk about crime.

This approach is pragmatic and humane. It is based on compassion for people with addictions and respect for their rights, including their right to life and their right to be treated like any other citizen. This medical approach has proven effective, unlike the coercive and repressive approach proposed by the Conservative government.

Repression has only had negative and deplorable effects for decades. Criminalizing drug use gives power to the Mafia and street gangs. We must talk about both public health and public safety because they go hand in hand. By criminalizing substance abuse, we force people struggling with this problem to live on the margins of society. By contrast, if we treat them, we help them overcome their addictions. Fewer drug users also means less crime and less power for the underworld.

Would we rather focus on medical science or ignorance, on compassion or fear? What moral values do we want to teach our children? Do we want to teach them to pass judgment on a sick individual or to help that person? Do we want to base our judgments on facts or ideology?

Canada is held up as an example for its universal health care system. Our system is based on respect for universal rights, including the right to life, health and safety. By restricting access to supervised injection sites, the government is denying patients their right to be treated and receive care. This is contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Supervised injection sites that have done well work with the community. That is the case with Vancouver's InSite. Effective mechanisms are put in place to promote cohabitation, patients must comply with a code of conduct and the site co-operates with the police, the public and various community organizations.

The Conservatives should be ashamed of inciting public fear and making up information that is not based on scientific data or studies. Instead, they should look at the studies and the Supreme Court decision supporting an exemption for a facility such as InSite.

● (1305)

They should co-operate with the opposition parties, with the NDP, which feels that policies should be based on facts, not ideologies. Crime reduction programs, including supervised injection sites, should be evaluated based on their ability to improve public health and safety.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is completely off base on some of her comments.

I appreciate the heckling from the opposite side. I participate in that myself, so I thank those members for balancing it out.

The bill would require organizations to submit the scientific evidence that would demonstrate the benefit of the site in their area. It would require that to happen, so the member is wrong on that.

However, the question ultimately comes down to why the member opposes parents in communities having a say on whether an injection site should be put up where their children play. That is a simple question. Would you not want to have your opinion heard for your children's safety?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we go to the answer, I just remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I always find it deplorable to see the Conservatives' patronizing attitude toward other MPs, considering we are here to advance the debate by relying on studies and scientific facts.

Here are some facts for the hon. member. Thirty peer-reviewed studies, published in journals like *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*, describe the positive impact of these sites. The member talked about people in the community having a say in the process. The fact is that 80% of respondents living or working in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where InSite is located, support this initiative.

The legislation should be based on facts, and there are many. I am going to mention a few. The rate of overdose deaths in Vancouver East has fallen by 35% since InSite opened. In one year, 2,171 InSite users were referred to addiction counselling or other support services. The number of people enrolling in a detox program is 1.7 times higher.

Therefore, there are many benefits. Thanks to the expert staff supervising InSite users, there are even people who survive overdoses.

The benefits can be quantified. They are based on scientific facts. It is all there. Even the Supreme Court invalidated the decision by the Conservatives, who were opposed to supervised injection sites.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, who gave a compelling, fact-based speech. The facts show that supervised injection sites save lives, help people, allow people to take care of themselves and get off drugs. These people are sick, suffering from addiction.

I can scarcely believe that the Conservatives have managed such a feat with Bill C-2. They have managed to challenge the Supreme Court, the scientific community, doctors and nurses and ignore international proof, all with a single bill. My hat goes off to them.

I would like my colleague to tell us how these sites protect the community. Thanks to centres such as InSite, fewer people will be shooting up in back alleys and parks. Our children will be less likely to come across dirty needles.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. He has identified all of the Conservatives' contradictions and inconsistencies regarding this bill, which has not been researched at all. It is simply based on an ideology governed by fear and that neglects to inform people about the benefits of these sites.

The sites are supervised by experts, whether doctors, nurses or people who provide psychosocial support. They ensure that the people there receive care. These people often come looking for help, and a relationship of trust needs to be developed. That can sometimes be subtle. They need help.

It means that fewer needles are left on the streets and the fewer people are struggling with problems of violence. That has all been documented. We have numbers to back that up, and we have been referring to them all day. I do not know what it will take for the

Conservatives to make an informed decision and consult people in the future.

• (1310)

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to today's debate on Bill C-2, which I would have entitled the "not in my backyard" bill.

The Conservatives' ideology is to always be sure to try and hide what they regard as neither fine nor good. It makes me think of those countries that are named hosts of the Olympic games and, at some point, decide that when the foreigners are about to arrive, it will be time to clear the area around the games site of the homeless and all those who, in the authorities' opinion, would not reflect a good image of the country.

However we must not bury our heads in the sand, as a member of the Quebec National Assembly has said. It is a fact, however, that people do play the ostrich. In vain we put on rose-coloured glasses, in vain we try to build a wall of silence around problems of health, homelessness, substance abuse and so on: the fact remains that these things exist.

The InSite centre was created to help people who are dealing with substance abuse problems, not to be a place of debauchery. To listen to the Conservative members' speeches since the start of this debate, one would think that the latter was true.

However, as my colleague just said, the courts that have considered this issue have been very clear.

First of all, the British Columbia Court of Appeal declared in 2010 that this was a medical centre falling under provincial jurisdiction. The matter should have been settled there: it had been put to rest. The province, the local authorities and the people familiar with the issue who work in the health field know what to do and what is good for their population. The City of Vancouver and the Government of British Columbia had decided that the supervised injection site had its place and its usefulness, as has since been demonstrated.

The Conservative government just cannot accept this. It is now bringing forward a bill that sets a whole pile of conditions. I think there are 26 in total. The purpose behind this, and it is certainly no secret, is to effectively shut down InSite and prevent other sites from opening.

I will talk a bit later about Montreal, for example, in Quebec. Indeed, the new mayor, Mr. Coderre, said during his campaign that this was a pressing public health and safety issue, and that he was considering at least creating an agency to discuss the issue more thoroughly and move forward with plans for a supervised injection site. I never thought I would be quoting him in a good way; no, I am just joking.

A Supreme Court decision followed in 2011, as the federal government had appealed the ruling of the B.C. Court of Appeal.

This was clear to the Supreme Court:

It is a strictly regulated health facility, and its personnel are guided by strict policies and procedures. It does not provide drugs to its clients, who must check in, sign a waiver, and are closely monitored during and after injection...The experiment has proven successful.

Government Orders

The Supreme Court also stated the following:

The Minister's decision, but for the trial judge's interim order, would have prevented injection drug users from accessing the health services offered by InSite, threatening their health and indeed their lives.

I think that this is very clear and very far from the horror stories we heard earlier from the Conservative minister. He would have us believe that supervised injection sites are located in residential neighbourhoods right next to daycares. According to him, these sites hold open houses every Sunday afternoon after church, so that small children can visit, play with needles and mingle with people who are, as they say, unsavoury. Obviously, this is not at all how these sites operate.

Bill C-2, with its 26 conditions, requires obtaining the approval of a city's police service, first responders and mayor. There is nothing wrong about this on the surface, because we tend to think that nobody can be against social acceptance.

However, the InSite centre in British Columbia is socially acceptable because the provincial government, the municipal government, the police, first responders and doctors have decided that it is. Clearly, all these people are not imbeciles who suddenly decided that it would be fun to open such a site, and, why not, to open more sites just about everywhere else in the province; and to arrange, as I was saying, for sites like this to be located in residential areas, more or less haphazardly, with no framework.

• (1315)

On the contrary, when a decision is made to set up services like these, it is done with a sense of social acceptability. We do not need an ambulance attendant to suddenly exercise a veto right and to say that it cannot work, and that the site will not be opened. That is not how it works.

In any event, it is clear to the Bloc Québécois that medical treatment and the organization of health services are not Ottawa's areas of jurisdiction. It is up to Quebec to evaluate and authorize treatment, together with Quebec's health institutions. Quebec has the power and the jurisdiction needed to open supervised injection sites as part of a solution to mental health and addiction issues. That, moreover, is a subject that was studied by Montreal's health and social services agency in 2011.

There is a very eloquent and interesting report entitled "Vers un service d'injection supervisée" that sets out succinctly what would justify the opening of a supervised injection site in Montreal. It is a matter of a higher mortality rate among injection drug users and infection epidemics caused by HIV and hepatitis C.

It says:

Cocaine use, the drug most often injected in Montréal, is a major determinant of HIV transmission, as is sharing used needles.

That is why, in one of the main recommendations in the conclusion of the report, the director of public health recommends fixed sites and a mobile unit staffed by nurses:

It is proposed that the fixed sites be located in RSSS [health and social services networks] institutions and community organizations that based on an agreement with the RSSS, would integrate medical supervision of injection and nursing care into the services they already offer.... The mobile unit would be more appropriate for priority sectors where a fixed service could not be offered....

According to this report, supervised injection sites are essential because even though they are geared toward only a small segment of Montreal's population, that segment of the population is affected by more than its share of health and social inequalities. Dr. Richard Lessard, Montreal's director of public health in 2011, stated that he felt it was a matter of social justice and equality.

I would like to give everyone a chance to have a look at this important report. As I was saying, this issue came up during the Montreal election campaign. It definitely has a lot of momentum. Neither Quebec, nor Montreal, nor public health and safety stakeholders will let the federal government create all kinds of obstacles and barriers to prevent this kind of service. That is what the Conservatives really want. They would rather not see and not know.

I am sure my government colleagues will be interested in the fact that the Montreal police has studied this issue. The Montreal police has said it will collaborate under certain conditions. That makes sense because the police force cares about public safety. It is in favour of a collaborative effort among partners to combine several approaches: prevention, treatment and care, law enforcement and harm reduction. To keep users from shooting up on the street, the Montreal police would encourage them to go to supervised injections sites.

Earlier, I was listening to the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who is clearly from Montreal. In response to the Conservatives' rhetoric, he said that by not allowing drug addicts to use supervised sites, they will not just suddenly give up drugs. Unfortunately, these people will not stop using. That is what we would like to see, but they will not necessarily stop using drugs. They will keep using, in public washrooms, parks or places where a child's hand, foot or finger could come into contact with a used needle and he could get sick or hurt himself. That has already happened; it has been documented.

It is a myth to think that banning these types of sites will improve the safety of our children and families. It is quite the opposite.

• (1320)

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the bill actually states some facts the member has missed. The fact is that the bill simply requires organizations to submit scientific evidence demonstrating the need for an injection site in a particular area.

Also, the fact is that the Liberal leader has admitted to possessing and smoking illegal drugs. The fact is that the NDP consistently votes against our bills on crime. The fact is that this morning New Democrats admitted this is a health issue and should not be legislated, yet they present a bill to legislate salt.

I want to ask the member why he thinks, based on these facts, that the NDP and Liberals are so soft on crime, so soft on heroin, and so tough on potato chips.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, the member should talk to the NDP and Liberals themselves. As a Bloc Québécois member, I cannot answer for them.

The member talked about scientific evidence, but we all know what the Conservative government thinks about scientists. Whether environmental scientists or scientists in other fields, they are not popular with this government, and in particular that member, who is living in the dinosaur era when it comes to technology, health and the environment.

Speaking of scientific evidence, according to the Canadian Medical Association, 80% of its members support services like InSite, and their opinion is based on scientific evidence. What is more, they are far more informed than members of the Conservative Party, the NDP, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Green Party or independent members.

The 2011 Supreme Court ruling in this case was based on scientific evidence. The court ruled that such sites are not only useful, but are also very important, and that they should exist in Vancouver, where InSite is located, as well as in other places.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to ask a question of my colleague, whose riding is not far from mine.

What does he think of the fact that, just a few hours after introducing this bill, the Conservatives exploited the issue to launch a partisan fundraising campaign?

Is that a responsible way to act, as legislators—to draft legislation simply to raise funds for a political party?

Mr. André Bellavance: I thank my hon. colleague from Sherbrooke for the question.

Quite frankly, I cannot say that I am surprised, because I am not. I have been a member here since 2004, and the Conservatives came to power in 2006. They are capable of anything. The member for Sherbrooke has surely seen this, too. He was elected here two years ago, but I am sure he is not surprised by anything the Conservatives do, either.

I would like to revisit a couple of issues. For instance, the Conservatives always attack the other parties and their positions in a demagogic way, particularly when it comes to justice and public safety. If we are not with the Conservatives, we are against them. A certain George Bush had the same attitude in the United States. There are no grey areas and there is no room for compromise; either you are right or you are wrong.

However, that is not how life works, and fortunately, Quebecers and Canadians are not fools. If these sites are properly set up, located in the right place, properly supervised and monitored, with the approval of experts in health care and public safety, people can really get the help they need. They will stop injecting hard drugs in parks, near schools and near daycare centres. Basically, they will stop doing everything the Conservatives say is so dangerous when it comes to these centres.

The fact that the Conservatives would use this issue to raise money is ludicrous, but it does not surprise me.

● (1325)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here to talk about Bill C-2, formerly Bill C-65. After prorogation, the bill was reintroduced with a different number.

This bill is a direct attack on supervised injection sites. Once again, we are faced with a government that uses every possible means to impose its political ideology at the expense of the broad social consensus and the positive effects of supervised injection sites.

We must remember that the Conservative government's bill challenges the Supreme Court decision and is just another way for the government to get what it wants and to put its moral values ahead of the lives of the most vulnerable Canadians.

We feel that all new legislation on supervised injection sites must respect the spirit of the Supreme Court decision. The 2011 decision reminds us, among other things, that Vancouver's InSite—the only safe injection site in Canada—has saved lives and improved health without increasing the incidence of drug use and crime in the surrounding area. It is also important to note that the police, local businesses and the chamber of commerce support those types of projects.

Evidence has shown that supervised injection sites effectively reduce the risk of contracting and spreading blood-borne infections, such as HIV and hepatitis C, and reduce deaths from overdoses. Evidence has also shown that these sites do not negatively affect public safety and that, in certain cases, they promote it by reducing the injection of drugs in public, the violence associated with such behaviour, and drug-related waste.

Supervised injection sites make it possible to strike the appropriate balance between public health and public safety. They also connect people in urgent need of health care with the services they need, such as primary health care and drug treatment services. Those are quantitative and qualitative facts that describe a reality, not an ideology.

We believe that harm reduction programs, including supervised injection sites, must be granted exemptions based on the evidence that they will improve public health and save lives, not based on ideology. Pragmatism and humanitarianism must be the two principles underlying the reality of drug use, a reality that goes against our moral values. It is unfortunate that the Conservatives do not feel that this debate in the House is useful and that they prefer to have the conversation by themselves.

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In order to clearly understand the purpose of supervised injection sites, one has to take an interest in the people who need the service and remember that they have rights and that we have responsibilities toward them. Drug consumption has significant effects on people's lives, including debt, a breakdown in communication with friends and family, isolation, crime, medical problems and stigmatization. We need to support these people, not send them to prison. We must support them, not exclude them. They need to be given an anchor so that they can regain control of their lives, not left adrift without a purpose while we turn a blind eye to their problems.

Supervised injection sites are an innovative response to the expectations of an advanced and enlightened society. The philosophy of harm reduction gives priority to the personal and social management of drugs and high-risk behaviours and their negative consequences.

It is therefore important to have a pragmatic dialogue and approach. In other words, we need to look at the situation with a critical eye and assess the social costs and benefits of our laws and practices for humanism, which places human development at the heart of economic, environmental, political and social decisions.

• (1330)

What is more, the Supreme Court's 2011 ruling warned the government against any law that would violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The discretion vested in the Minister of Health is not absolute: as with all exercises of discretion, the Minister's decisions must conform to the *Charter*. If the Minister's decision results in an application of the *CDSA* that limits the s. 7 rights of individuals in a manner that is not in accordance with the *Charter*, then the Minister's discretion has been exercised unconstitutionally. In the special circumstances of this case, the Court should go on to consider whether the Minister's decision violated the claimants' *Charter* rights. The issue is properly before the Court and justice requires that it be considered.

What is more, in this decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the charter guarantees Canadians the right to access supervised injection sites and that such services should generally exist when the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

A 2004 study by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction indicated that supervised injection sites reach out to vulnerable groups and are accepted by communities. That is what social acceptance is. The study also showed that these sites improve the health of their users, reduce high-risk behaviour, and reduce fatal overdoses and the consumption of drugs in public places.

Canadians do not understand the Conservative government's lack of empathy towards citizens living with this difficult reality, and the dearth of recognition and support it shows towards organizations working day after day to improve the well-being of those citizens.

Canadians see a government that imposes a course opposite to that recommended by various qualified stakeholders working with safe injection sites.

Bill C-2 will establish a process that is so burdensome that it may well deter applicants from even trying to open a safe injection site.

What would happen if an applicant should accidentally forget to include something? Could the application be turned down automatically? Even if an applicant had all the required documents

and the full support of the community, it would still be possible for the minister to deny the application.

It is important to remember that a number of projects are on hold in major Canadian cities and that Bill C-2 is an obstacle to their implementation.

Speaking about safe injection sites, on June 7, Dr. Richard Massé, the director of public health for Montreal, said in *Le Devoir*:

...These services save lives. It is too early to say what will happen, but... [this bill] appears to me to create significant barriers, even though the Supreme Court clearly said that not providing these services was a violation of human rights.

Also in *Le Devoir*, the Canadian Medical Association said it sees a bill that is built on ideology. As to the objection that establishing a place where drugs obtained from illegal sources are consumed could cause a lot of harm in the community, Quebec's health minister says that the studies that have been conducted on the subject do not bear that out. He said that the bill should be studied further, specifically with the justice minister of Quebec.

Many groups are concerned about this bill that challenges the Supreme Court decision. It is designed as a way to undermine the court's decision and to find another way to close safe injection sites because they go counter to this government's ideology.

Why do the Conservatives not simply admit what this bill is about? What are the real reasons behind the bill? How far are the Conservatives prepared to go to jeopardize health, safety and the dignity of human life and when are they going to admit that this bill really is based on ideology?

• (1335)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Actually, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member opposite. He is absolutely correct that the stigma and the socio-economic and health implications of addiction are devastating. This is dead true, but it is not unique just to heroin, nor is it unique just to drug addictions, as I mentioned earlier.

I am somewhat curious as to what is next for the NDP. The NDP is on record, along with the Liberal health critic, as feeling we should, as a government paid for by the Canadian taxpayers, provide the heroin as well. I just want to know if that is the next step in the NDP's agenda.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should realize that injection sites reduce economic and social costs.

Just think of a homeless person who wants to shoot up heroin. He must dissolve it in water, which he will find somewhere if he is lucky. It might be in a toilet or a puddle that might contain oil or animal urine. As a result, that individual might inject urine into his blood, which could lead to infections and diseases.

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In addition, he might leave the needle anywhere and other individuals might come into contact with it and become infected, because there are no safe places for people in that situation. Those people end up in our social service centres and hospitals, which results in additional costs.

The hon. member should realize that safe injection sites reduce social costs and help those dealing with that reality. Experts can supervise them and help them find a way out. That is an important aspect the Conservatives seem to forget.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord on his outstanding work in the House of Commons.

I have personally seen him on the ground in Charlevoix. He is doing a great job with his constituents. He is in touch with them and he is also very active in the House. I wanted to pay tribute to him and talk about my community, because I know that he is very present in his.

In the lower mainland of British Columbia, in the greater Vancouver area, support for a more sensitive approach to safe injection sites is roughly 80%. However, the Conservatives want to go against that support and pass a bill to close those centres.

In my colleague's view, when a cause has this much support from a community, whether his or mine, should the federal government listen to the local people who understand the situation?

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, basically, the Conservatives want public support for a project. However, InSite in Vancouver has that support. People want it. They see the benefits of a supervised site.

All the analyses, statistics and studies conducted by experts, not just by the government, clearly show that these sites improve public safety and health and promote the reintegration of the people who use them.

When such projects have the people's support and proven benefits, all the government needs to do is approve them and let them become a reality.

• (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a bit saddened to have to speak to Bill C-2, which is an attempt by the government to change the channel after all the months of crime and corruption among Conservatives. Every night that Canadians turn on the television, they see police investigations into the Prime Minister's Office or into prominent Conservatives such as Mike Duffy, Nigel Wright, Pamela Wallin, Patrick Brazeau, and Rob Ford. Every night—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. minister of state is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I read the orders for this morning and I do not think the member is debating the correct issue. I wonder if you could remind the member of the bill that he should be speaking to. It would help those of us who are here to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The member is correct that there is a rule of relevance. However, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster has just begun. I am confident that he will be speaking to the matter before the House at this time, which is Bill C-2.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I absolutely always respect what we are debating on the floor of the House of Commons, but the debate on why Bill C-2, which is deeply flawed legislation, has been brought forward is very much related to the circumstance in which the government finds itself right now. Criminal inquiries into Conservative activities are taking place.

Even though the government knows this bill is bad, even though the bill certainly does not have the support of the population of my area and is primarily concerned with a 15-page document that wants to shut down InSite, and even though the government is attempting to change the channel, the reality is that this bill is on the floor of the House of Commons as a result of the criminal inquiries into Conservatives and the corruption we are seeing in the Conservative Party.

In my area, in Burnaby—New Westminster, I get half the vote. The other half of the population, which I support, have their rights, and many of them chose to vote Conservative in the last election, but I meet Conservatives every day who say that they did not vote for the criminal activities that we are seeing in the Conservative Party with the police inquiries. They did not vote for the corruption that they are seeing.

Rather than putting forward flawed legislation like Bill C-2, it would be much better for the government to work to lower the crime level in its caucus and in its party. I think that would be a very positive step.

When we look at the overall criminal justice system, what we see is mistake after mistake by the government. With all the police inquiries taking place right now, a limited number of police officers across the country are spending their time inquiring into criminal activity in the Conservative Party. That is worsened by the fact that the Conservatives never kept their key commitment in the last election and previous elections to actually put more police officers on the line.

We see the corruption and the criminal activity, and we see police officers having to spend their time inquiring into criminal activities of Conservatives rather than doing what they should do, which is protecting our communities. One would argue that they are protecting their communities from Conservatives, and perhaps that is a valid point, but I can say that the NDP will be protecting Canadians from Conservatives by booting them out of office in the 2015 election. That will be our objective.

It is not just the fact that what we are seeing is a lack of commitment to add more front-line police officers. It is not just the fact that police officers are now having to spend all of their time inquiring into the criminal activity of Conservatives. It is the disrespect with which police officers are being treated by the Conservative government that also concerns me.

That is why, rather than presenting Bill C-2, it would have been good for the government to actually put into place the NDP motion that was adopted just before the government came into power back in 2005. It was for a public safety officer compensation fund, and it was an NDP initiative. The Conservative MPs actually voted for it. That was back in 2005.

Every year since then, police officers and firefighters from across the country have come to Parliament Hill on an annual basis to ask one thing. They want to know when the government is going to put into place a public safety officer compensation fund so that when they die in the line of duty, their families will actually be taken care of.

I have spoken to police officers' families. I have spoken to firefighters' families. I have seen the devastation that happens when a member of their family who was a police officer or firefighter died in the line of duty. There is no compensation in so many cases. I have heard of families having to sell their homes. I have heard of families giving up thoughts of their children going off to school. That is all because Conservatives steadfastly and stubbornly refuse to bring in the public safety officer compensation fund.

We are not talking about a lot of money. It is a small payout for families who have lost a loved one, someone who has given their life for the country. Conservatives have really slapped the faces of police officers and firefighters by refusing to bring that in.

The NDP has always supported a public safety officer compensation fund similar to the one in the United States. In 2015, when we replace the government, we will be bringing in a public safety officer compensation fund so that those families will be taken care of. Canadians can be sure of that.

At the same time, there are crime prevention programs. That is another bill that we could have seen instead of Bill C-2. No government has cut back as much on crime prevention as the Conservative government.

• (1345)

We have seen the closure of crime prevention programs across the country because the government has refused to adequately fund crime prevention. It is a no-brainer. The reality is that for every \$1 we put into crime prevention programs, we save \$6 in policing costs, court costs and prison costs later on, yet the government has cut back on crime prevention programs. It is absurd.

Here are three of the things we could have seen instead of Bill C-2.

We could have seen actual enhancement of the number of front-line officers—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Julian: That is okay, Mr. Speaker. I do not mind Conservatives heckling. It just shows how sensitive they are to the corruption and the criminal activity that the public is denouncing across the country.

The Conservatives could have put in place a public safety officer compensation fund. That would have been a good bill to see. As well, they could have restored the cuts they made on the crime

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prevention program. Instead of that, what they did was present this flawed bill. This, as well, flies in the face of the legal system. The Supreme Court ruled in 2011 that programs like InSite should exist.

Why was InSite put into place in the first place? It was put into place because of the escalating number of overdose deaths in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, skyrocketing up to several hundreds. The community responded by putting in place InSite, with the support of the city, the province, the health authority and the community. I mentioned earlier in speaking to my colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord that it was with the support of over 80% of the public in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

The Supreme Court, tested by this, as the government wanted to shut the thing down, said yes, that there was definitely a place for this, not only because it was good for crime reduction, not only because it had reduced overdose deaths by 35%, but because it made good policy sense. That is what the Supreme Court ruled.

Again, we have a government that likes to slap the law in the face. It is not just police officers who receive its bad treatment, and not just Parliament, where we see regularly the disrespect for democratic institutions, but it is also a Supreme Court judgment that clearly stated that a program like InSite was beneficial for the community.

Instead of responding to that, the government brought forward Bill C-2. It would allow the minister to shut the whole thing down. Does that make sense when there has been a 35% reduction in overdose deaths? Does that make sense when we have actually seen an overall reduction in crime? Does that make sense when we talk about thousands of referrals to the whole issue around addiction programs?

This has also not been treated well by the government, but when thousands of people have been referred to addiction program to be weaned off drugs, how the government has approached this issue does not make sense, not at all. Here we have a community that is in support of a program, that has reduced the crime rate and reduced overdose deaths and increased referrals to addiction treatment programs, but the government says that it will shut the damned thing down. It does not make sense from our point of view. It does not make sense from the public's point of view.

We are debating this bad bill now, but I, like so many others across the country, can hardly wait for 2015 when we finally get the chance to throw this corrupt, tired, criminal government out of office and put in place an NDP government in Ottawa.

• (1350)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): My goodness, Mr. Speaker, the bill simply requires that there be presented scientific evidence that an injection site is necessary and would do well in a community. What is wrong with that? It would do exactly what the member professes to say. He talks about democracy, but what is wrong with asking parents and people in the community what they think? Why is the NDP so soft on crime, soft on heroin, and tough on salt?

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Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country have seen an unprecedented number of criminal investigations into the Conservative Party. The Conservatives embrace people like Rob Ford. They think that kind of conduct is fine. They say that. What we have seen with Mike Duffy and a whole range of other high-ranking Conservatives is that the Conservatives and criminals seem to go together in parallel. It is hard to take lessons from a government that is corrupt and has had so many criminal investigations into its conduct.

I know the minister does not like to hear scientific facts. However, the reality is that over 80% of people in my community in the Lower Mainland support the principle of InSite for the simple reason that science shows there were 2,171 referrals, a lowering by 35% of the overdose rate, and an accompanying lowering of criminal activity. If the government followed the science, it would not be presenting this bill. It would be permitting InSite to operate.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not catch all of the member's remarks, but I caught some of them.

I want to avoid the political rhetoric around this bill. I am on the public safety committee and I am quite disgusted that this bill is not going to the health committee.

I would ask the member this. Is it not about the end result? Is it not about people's lives and the health of people? The evidence around InSite is that there is less HIV and other health problems as a result of it being there. Therefore, the government is going the wrong way with this bill, because it is really about people, their health, and indeed their lives. We should not be talking about more punishment or shutting these places down, but about ensuring we are doing the right thing in terms of the health of people who are struggling with drug addiction and exposing others in the community to health risks.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the question from the member for Malpeque is relevant. I have respect for him, but there was a skyrocketing number of deaths by overdose that took place after the former Liberal government, of which he was a part, closed down the national housing program. The government's decision was devastating for the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. The Liberal government decided it would no longer provide housing and that those affected would be out on the street. As a result, there was no treatment offered for addictions and there was a skyrocketing number of deaths by overdose. Therefore, InSite was put in place because of an appallingly irresponsible decision by a Liberal government. Now we have an appallingly irresponsible approach by a Conservative government that is trying to shut down InSite.

What we need is a responsible approach, one in keeping with Canadian values. That is what the NDP offers.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I am proud to carry on the debate on the important discussion of InSite and injection sites.

Although I was born in Holland, I was raised in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. I understand all too well what the east end of Vancouver was like in the 1960s and 1970s. It was not the greatest thing, because one saw a tremendous amount of people, for a variety of reasons, with severe drug or alcohol addictions. There

were folks down there from all walks of life. It was an extremely unfortunate circumstance as a young man to witness the tragedy of what happened to these people's lives.

Fast forward to years later, and we have InSite.

I am the first person, along with everybody else in the House, who would encourage every Canadian not to use illicit drugs whatsoever. That is the main principle, but it is very difficult to get people off illicit drugs if they are in the back alleys, street corners, throughways, under bridges, or anywhere else.

The best way to get to these people is to show them compassion and the dignity of their lives. They may be on the bottom rung of the ladder, in a deep hole where they keep digging it deeper and see no way out with the exception of an overdose or possible suicide. It is the Canadian people, the good people of Vancouver, east end Vancouver, and former municipal and provincial politicians who had the insight to come up with InSite. They were able to get these people off the streets and into a shelter. Even though they were still using drugs, there was an ability to work and consult with them to get them off the drugs and allow them to become productive members of our society.

On the other hand, we can just ignore the problem. They will be back on the streets, under bridges and in vacant lots, but then we will have the paramedics, firefighters, police officers, and social caseworkers going in when the situation has gone too far.

I know everybody in the NDP, Conservative Party, Liberal Party and other parties here are very clear that we do not want young people or anyone resorting to illicit drugs of any kind. However, when that situation arises, it is best to get them off the street to a place where they can be safe and get counselling. They can then understand that there is hope and a possibility that life can be better for them.

InSite is all about that. Injection sites are all about that. It is to show the compassion and love that we have for these individuals who are going through a very severe and difficult time.

Some of these folks may have come from the aboriginal community, some may have gone through a divorce, some may have psychological or physical problems, and some may have come from our police, firefighter, or veteran community. We do not know where these people have come from, and to be honest, I really do not care. All I see is a human being.

A lot of my Conservative colleagues over there profess to be of the Christian faith. I ask them this: what is the Christian thing to do in this regard? It is to reach out with an open hand and show the compassion and love that these people deserve in order to turn their lives around, and there is a lot of evidence of where this has happened.

My great colleague, the representative for Vancouver East for the past sixteen and a half years, has been in the forefront of this struggle. She has represented Vancouver East with great pride and honour and with great distinction. We are very proud to have her, one day in cabinet, but right now in our caucus. She is an outstanding human being who understands the situation probably better than anybody else in the country or in Parliament.

With that, I will resume this most vital discussion shortly after question period.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member will have five minutes remaining in his speech when this matter returns before the House.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

HOLODOMOR

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 23, I encourage all Canadians to remember and raise awareness of the Holodomor, which was the genocide by starvation perpetrated by Joseph Stalin's ruthless Soviet regime in an attempt to stamp out Ukrainian nationhood. This deliberately planned famine claimed the lives of millions of Ukrainian men, women, and children in 1932 and 1933.

As Prime Minister Harper said following his visit to the Holodomor memorial in Kyiv in 2010, "To contemplate an act of malevolence on that scale truly focuses one's mind on the nature of this evil".

Saturday, November 23, marks the 80th anniversary of the Holodomor, one of the most horrific events in human history.

Canada was one of the first countries in the world to officially recognize the Holodomor as a genocide. My colleague, the MP for Selkirk—Interlake, introduced bill C-459, which designates the fourth Saturday of November as a memorial day for the Ukrainian famine, but also acknowledges the famine as an act of genocide.

I encourage my colleagues and all Canadians to participate in the numerous Holodomor commemorations across Canada this week-end. We must never forget.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we carry on, the member may have used the given name of one of the members of Parliament. If he did, I would ask him to avoid that in the future.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

* * *

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ending homelessness is a plan, not a dream, and affordable housing is a strategy. It gives families support and reason to hope, shelters women from abuse, lets seniors live in dignity, and brings children in from the cold.

Back in 1994, the federal government backed away from this strategy, causing a national housing crisis.

Next year, when the last housing operating agreements end, it will get worse. In Toronto alone, 166,000 people are desperately waiting for housing.

Statements by Members

Tomorrow is National Housing Day. If the government renews the housing agreements, does vital repairs, and builds new affordable housing, we can plan, once and for all, to end homelessness and fix Canada's housing crunch.

* * *

REVELSTOKE HIGHWAY RESCUE

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each year rescue units from across Canada commit to saving lives and witness some of the most gruesome scenes in relation to highway accidents involving injury and death.

The Trans-Canada Highway through the Rocky Mountains is one of the most challenging pieces of roadway in Canada and can be unpredictable at any time of year.

The Revelstoke Highway Rescue firefighters are being recognized this month by Emergency Management British Columbia for their exemplary service to the motoring public in road rescue.

Revelstoke Fire Chief Rob Girard stated that the extrication work done by the team using the jaws of life is very important.

Firefighters Steve Olsson and Dan Sculnick will travel to Victoria, B.C., this month to accept the award on behalf of the Revelstoke Highway Rescue team.

Brad Faucett, president of the Revelstoke Fire Rescue Society, said that they continue to be a very dedicated group who are there to help the motoring public in crisis.

Congratulations to the brave men and women of the Revelstoke Highway Rescue team for an award well deserved.

* * *

CHRIS HAYES

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce the untimely passing of a true Cape Breton ambassador, Mr. Chris Hayes. Chris passed away on the weekend after a tragic accident while doing something he truly, passionately loved: enjoying the great outdoors in Cape Breton.

Chris had a great sense of spirit and adventure, discovering all the outdoors had to offer. I had the opportunity to witness this first-hand through my time at his archery club.

At the time of his passing, Chris was a reporter and editor with the *Cape Breton Post*; he had worked for the *Post* for 29 years. During this time, Chris encompassed all the qualities of a great journalist. He was dedicated and compassionate, taking on many issues with fairness and conviction. The industry lost a true champion. He was a very genuine person and passionate about his family, his work and his community.

I ask this House to join me in extending our condolences to his wife Marlene and his sons Robert, Richard, and Joshua. He will be dearly missed by all of us.

*Statements by Members***KOREAN WAR VETERANS**

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government deemed 2013 to be the Year of the Korean War Veteran. We are grateful to all the brave men and women who served during the Korean War, and we mourn the loss of the 516 Canadians who gave their lives in the defence of freedom.

It is with great honour that I will be hosting a tribute to Korean War veterans from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo this Saturday, November 23, at the Kamloops Legion.

These include Robert Caffrey, Arthur Duggan, Barry Lister, Gordon MacDonald, Ray Maxfield, Bob Mitchell, John Price, Robbie Robertson, Leon Rushcall, Fred Shelton, Alex Sim, Allan Tassell, Gary Williams and of course those who are no longer with us: Mitsutoshi Arikado, Edward Alexis Fortier, Arthur Oakley and George Wilkinson.

Thanks to the sacrifices of these veterans, the Republic of Korea is one of our greatest allies, sharing our values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

VAL-D'OR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise here today to congratulate the board of directors and staff of the Val-d'Or Chamber of Commerce. On October 16, 2013, this exceptionally dynamic organization in Val-d'Or was awarded the prestigious honour of Chamber of Commerce of the Year for 2013 by the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec.

The chamber of commerce won this award through the hard work of its executive and members and the collective efforts of the entire business community. The award means great exposure for Val-d'Or's economy.

The Val-d'Or Chamber of Commerce sponsored an aboriginal business integration program that has been very successful.

With 1,120 active members, the Val-d'Or Chamber of Commerce has also earned its accreditation with distinction from the Chamber Accreditation Council of Canada.

On behalf of my constituents and my colleagues, I would like to say bravo to the Val-d'Or Chamber of Commerce.

* * *

[English]

GREY CUP

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a proud member of Parliament from Hamilton Tiger-Cat country, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to recognize the CFL's eastern division victors and the next Grey Cup champions, the Hamilton Tiger-Cats.

The Ticats have had one heck of a season. Displaced from the home field, against the odds, when everyone had written them off,

they fought back and won. It is a story of sheer grit and determination, much like the city they hail from.

On Sunday, they are going to do it again. Against a tough opponent, against the cheers and jeers of the hometown crowd, the Hamilton Ticats will show the country what they are made of.

They are as true as a cup of Tim Hortons coffee, as strong as steel, and with as much heart as the people in the greater Hamilton area. The hon. member for Burlington, seated behind me, has got it right: "Oskee wee wee. Oskee waa waa. Holy mackinaw. Tigers, eat 'em raw".

Mr. Mike Wallace: "Oskee wee wee. Oskee waa waa. Holy mackinaw. Tigers, eat 'em raw".

The Speaker: Order, please.

I think only one member at a time needs to make the S. O. 31.

The hon. member for Palliser, I hope, will have something better to add.

* * *

GREY CUP

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker, and it is very good and gracious of you to have noticed that right away.

Certainly, in response to Hamilton making all that racket, we in the agricultural sector have noticed that empty 45-gallon drums make a lot of noise.

This Sunday, millions of Canadians will tune in to watch a sea of green as the Saskatchewan Roughriders take on the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, in Regina, for the 101st Grey Cup game.

With the leadership of Coach Corey Chamblin and the grit of CFL stars like Darian Durant, Kory Sheets, Chris Getzlaf, Weston Dressler and Brendon LaBatte, just to name a few, the Riders are ready to compete for the title.

With the power of the offensive and defensive lines and the precision of the special teams, the Riders are ready to hoist the Grey Cup in victory.

I would like to extend a special thanks to the thousands of community-minded volunteers who pitched in to make this celebration safe and fun.

Two things are certain: first, snow or shine, this year's Grey Cup is going to be the best ever and the best for years to come; and second, the Riders are going to win and all those kittens are going to go home feeling green with envy.

Let us hear it. Go, Riders, go.

•(1410)

[Translation]

TERREBONNE FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the honorary chair of the Terrebonne guignolée, I would like to acknowledge the exceptional work of the many volunteers and organizations in my riding that take part in this annual event. I am referring to such organizations as the Oeuvres de Galilée, the Knights of Columbus, the Daughters of Isabella, the Lions Club, firefighters, parishes and Scouts. It is a pleasure to be working with them again.

Many teams will be going door to door in our community on December 7 to solicit donations for the growing number of families in need living in the Les Moulins RCM.

In these economic times when every penny counts for families, their generosity is even more striking. I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart everyone who can make a donation.

I want to wish all families who benefit from this campaign a very merry Christmas. I would like to congratulate all Canadians who make donations to a Christmas campaign or who donate throughout the year.

I wish everyone great success with the campaign.

* * *

[English]

LUNG CANCER

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, November marks Lung Cancer Awareness Month. We know that one in 11 Canadians will be diagnosed with lung cancer in their lifetime. In fact, 55 Canadians die each day from this terrible disease.

The good news is that there are many preventive measures that can help reduce the risk of ever enduring lung cancer and help people live longer, healthier lives. That is why I am proud of the actions our government has taken to raise awareness and fight against lung cancer.

This November, I have engaged in a number of initiatives, from meeting with kids to encourage them to break off with cigarette smoking to encouraging Canadians to test for unsafe radon gas levels. Our Conservative government also leads the way in scientific research. We have funded over \$1 billion for cancer research and prevention since 2006.

* * *

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the importance of establishing a national palliative care strategy. Every one of us here will die, and all of our families have faced the loss of a loved one or will face that loss. These traumatic moments are made much more difficult when there is a lack of access to quality palliative care.

Many jurisdictions have no 24/7 home support for dying patients or access to hospice care. It means that patients end up in emergency

Statements by Members

wards or overcrowded hospitals, with unnecessary cost to the health care system and unnecessary stress to the patients and their families.

Palliative care is home-centred. It is family-centred. It is community-centred. That is why the New Democratic Party is saying it is time we worked together, as all parliamentarians, on a national palliative care strategy, working with the provinces and territories and first nations and Inuit people to set the benchmarks.

I am calling on my colleagues to work with us on Motion No. 456 to establish a national palliative care strategy.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library announced the acquisition of more than 200 personal letters of James Wolfe, the general who led the British troops on the Plains of Abraham in the legendary battle of Quebec.

Our Conservative government was proud to support bringing to Canada this invaluable addition to our national heritage. Through the movable cultural property program, which supports the preservation of Canada's artistic, historic and scientific heritage, the government extended a grant to help ensure that these letters could be acquired.

By bringing these letters to Canada, a key part of our history can be preserved and shared for years to come. Our history defines us as people. The more we know about our history, the better we understand where we have come from, who we are and what makes us unique as Canadians.

I extend thanks to Helmhorst Investments for its philanthropic support in this great initiative to preserve and share our country's history.

* * *

JENNIFER LYNCH

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I attended the funeral service of a friend and constituent, Jennifer Lynch. Jennifer had an exemplary career as a lawyer and as a consultant on conflict management, advising national organizations in Canada and the U.S. She regularly served public institutions as chairperson of the RCMP External Review Committee and as chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, to name but two examples.

Jennifer was also dedicated to the well-being of her community, serving on the boards of the children's hospital, the University of Ottawa, the Salvation Army, Crime Stoppers and the women's legal action fund. In politics, Jennifer was a Progressive Conservative, advocating as president of the PC women's caucus for the advancement of women, and served as the chief of staff to the leader of her party, the Right Hon. Joe Clark.

Oral Questions

Even when confronted with cancer, she contributed by taking enormous risks to help test new treatments. She is to be thanked for the fullness and goodness of her life.

I offer our condolences to her husband, Pierre Richard, to her family and to her numerous friends and admirers. We have lost a great and generous Canadian.

* * *

● (1415)

CYBERBULLYING

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that our children are safe from online predators. Yesterday we delivered on our commitment to ensure that children are better protected from cyberbullying by introducing the protecting Canadians from online crime act.

Cyberbullying goes far beyond average schoolyard bullying and, in many cases, crosses the line into criminal activity. Our legislation would prohibit the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. It would empower the courts to remove intimate images from the Internet and give them the power to order the seizure of computers, cellphones, and other devices used to commit the offence.

As we have seen far too often, cyberbullying destroys the lives of children. It clearly demands a stronger criminal justice response. That is what this legislation would provide. I ask all members of the House to stand up, protect the children of this nation, and support this legislation.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am from Laval, so I know a thing or two about crooked mayors. I sympathize with the people of Toronto. At least our shady mayor, who was caught with money instead of crack, resigned before the Conservatives came to his defence.

We can all console each other. Even compared to Laval, Montreal and Toronto, no one has more ridiculous excuses than the Conservatives when it comes to defending the schemes coming out of the Prime Minister's Office. They can have selective memory all they want, but Nigel Wright wrote it out in black and white: the Prime Minister knew about the scandals in broad terms. When Rob Ford, Gilles Vaillancourt and Gérald Tremblay are more credible than the Prime Minister, we have a problem.

The puppets can keep applauding the spoon-fed lines from kids in short pants at the Prime Minister's Office while the police are on their tail. We will continue to demand accountability. Canadians deserve better and they deserve the truth. They know that only the chief prosecutor of the House, the leader of the NDP, will get it for them.

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been 10 long days since the Liberal Party reminded Canadians that it just does not trust them with their hard-earned money. On Remembrance Day, no less, the Liberal Party slammed veterans by saying that giving money to veterans who are injured in the service of Canada is like “hanging a case of beer in front of a drunk”, who will go and spend it on booze and addictions.

Veterans are scratching their heads. How can the Liberal veterans affairs critic claim to stand up for veterans and criticize their intentions at the same time? Veterans deserve better. How many more days do veterans have to wait for the leader of the Liberal Party to fire his veterans spokesman?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there has never been such an event in Canada's history: crimes were committed in the office of a governing prime minister by his staff and on his behalf. Corruption, fraud and breach of trust: we are talking about criminal activities organized and carried out by people who are under the sole responsibility of the Prime Minister.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to rise in the House and take responsibility?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, what we saw yesterday is the fact that the Prime Minister took extraordinary leadership on this matter. It is quoted right in the documents:

Rob Staley, legal representative for the PMO, advised my office that he had clear orders from the Prime Minister to provide complete cooperation with the investigation, and to provide any assistance or documentation the RCMP requested.

That is real leadership. That is the leadership this Prime Minister has been showing. Also, it says in there quite clearly that the Prime Minister did not know, and as the Prime Minister has said, had he known, he would have in no way endorsed such a scheme.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 28, I asked the Prime Minister what instructions he gave his staff on the Mike Duffy scandal. What did he say? I will quote him word for word: “I did not give any such instructions”, a Clintonian answer.

Yesterday's court documents proved that those words are the opposite of the truth. Not only did Nigel Wright get instructions from the Prime Minister, he even got approval: “We are good to go...”.

Based on that alone, the Prime Minister has engaged in a cover-up of crimes in his own office. Why the cover-up if he did not do anything wrong?

Oral Questions

• (1420)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documentation says no such thing. What it says is that the Prime Minister, the moment he found out about this, went into his office and instructed his office to co-operate fully with the RCMP.

As I have said on a number of occasions in this House, on February 13, when Senator Duffy approached the Prime Minister to justify his inappropriate expenses, the Prime Minister told him he had to repay those expenses. That is something that has been very clear. The documentation also shows that the Prime Minister did not know about this, and as the Prime Minister has said, had he known about this scheme, he would have in no way endorsed such a scheme.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually, yesterday the Prime Minister admitted that he said to Nigel Wright that he was good to go. When confronted with that, the Prime Minister told another nose-stretcher. He claimed that he meant “good to go with [Mike] Duffy paying his own expenses”. That is what he meant.

In that case, there is really only one question. Since when does the Prime Minister of Canada have to approve a senator repaying his own expenses?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said on a number of occasions, and as the Prime Minister has said, the standard we expect on this side of the House is that if people had some expenses they did not incur, they should not be accepting those expenses.

When he talks about things not really shaping up, how about him? He was offered a bribe 17 years ago. Did he reach out to the police? No, he did not reach out to the police. He did not think it was important. He did not look in the envelope that was offered him across the table. Why did he not tell the police 17 years ago, and spare the people of Quebec—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is completely absurd to claim that a senator needs the approval of the Prime Minister to reimburse expenses. No one in Canada believes that nonsense.

[English]

Page 71 of the RCMP document says, “the Prime Minister was informed by his staff that they were working on a plan”. Yesterday, the Prime Minister's so-called spokesman over there said that the Prime Minister expected more from his staff, not just from Nigel Wright but from his whole staff, so why is only Nigel Wright the one to have lost his job?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documents clearly show that it is Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright who are the subject of this investigation.

I will tell members what is awkward and obscure. The Leader of the Opposition said he never reached out to the police himself, because he had no proof that what he was actually being offered was a bribe, and then he did not look in the envelope to see what was there. One would have thought, when this started happening in Quebec, he would have reached out proactively to the police, but no. Once the investigation started, he was contacted by the police. He did not think it was important enough to call them.

That is not the standard—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a concept: true/false, good/bad, legal/illegal, saying no to the envelope/handing out the envelope.

Senators Tkachuk, LeBreton, and Stewart Olsen publicly denied that they had ever been told by the Prime Minister's Office to change the report on Duffy. All three denied; according to the RCMP, all three lied. In court documents, the RCMP, through dozens of emails, show how the report was doctored on orders of the Prime Minister's Office—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition should know that we do not use a word like that in parliamentary language in the chamber.

The hon. member for Wascana.

• (1425)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP says it has reasonable cause to believe that the Prime Minister's senior entourage was engaged in a scheme of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. It is Wright, and it is Duffy, and it is at least a dozen more—the fraud squad in the PMO. They first plotted to have the Conservative Party pay Duffy, and for that, the police say, they did consult the Prime Minister and got a “good to go”, but such a payment would have been just as wrong as the payment by Nigel Wright.

Why did the Prime Minister say “good to go” for a payment from the Conservative Party?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): The Prime Minister said no such thing, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister was very clear on February 13. When he was approached by Senator Duffy to justify these expenses, he was very clear, and he said he had to repay those expenses.

What we are hearing now from the angry Leader of the Opposition is hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. It is okay to deny something for 17 years. It is okay not to address the police when clearly, corruption is happening in Quebec. That is all right.

That is not the type of leadership Canadians want. The type of leadership they want is the leadership shown by this Prime Minister, who immediately, when he found out, took immediate action, unlike that member, who waited 17 years.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they have just contradicted the police over there.

Oral Questions

It does not matter whether the amount was \$32,000 or \$90,000. It does not matter whether it was paid by the Conservative Party or by Nigel Wright. Either way, it is bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. The RCMP says it has reasonable cause to believe those crimes were committed by that fraud squad in the PMO, and now that same gang is out in Brandon running the Conservative by-election.

Why has the Prime Minister not fired the fraud squad instead of empowering it to do more damage to Brandon and to Canada?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, go figure that the Liberals would ask a question about Brandon. It is like Veterans' Week. In the week leading up to Veterans' Week, they are concerned. As soon as it is done, there is not a question.

I will tell everyone what the people of Brandon are like. They are like the people of Oak Ridges—Markham. They do not agree with the Liberal leader, who wants to take away marketing freedom from the farmers. They do not agree with the Liberal leader, who thinks that a dictatorship is a form of government that he is most proud of. They do not agree with the Liberal leader, who thinks that minimum mandatory sentences for heinous crimes should be removed. They do not agree with the Liberal leader, who thinks that families should pay more taxes. What they want is a government and a member of Parliament who will stand up for them before, during, and after an election, and that is what—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Wascana.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): That is why they will vote Liberal, Mr. Speaker.

Police records show that Senator Gerstein tried to hamper the Deloitte audit. That is obstruction of justice. They show that LeBreton, Tkachuk, and Stewart Olsen whitewashed a Senate report on Duffy. That is corruption of a parliamentary process, all ordered by the fraud squad in the PMO and all part of the crimes police believe were committed by the Prime Minister's most inner circle. Most of those people still work for the Prime Minister.

How could the CEO of such an operation be so negligent and so incompetent to engender such behaviour?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when he talks about the CEO of an organization, I can only assume that he is talking about the former prime minister he worked under. Of course, as we know, we still have some \$40 million outstanding—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives claim that the Prime Minister was not aware of the \$90,000 payoff. However, the RCMP alleges that the Prime Minister was broadly aware and that he signed off on something. We just do not know what. We do know the Prime Minister's senior staff were devoting large amounts of time and effort to this cover-up.

Will the member confirm that the Prime Minister was briefed in broad terms on his staff's efforts to solve the problem with Mike Duffy's expenses?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said that on a number of occasions in the House. I will go to the timeline once again for the hon. member.

On February 13, Senator Duffy approached the Prime Minister to try to justify his inappropriate expenses, and the Prime Minister told him that he had to repay those inappropriate expenses.

Senator Duffy then went on television and told Canadians that he had done that. We know that statement obviously was not true.

Members can follow the leadership of this Prime Minister, because as soon as he found out that was not the case, he went back to his office and ordered his staff to work with the RCMP and assist them. We can contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition, who waited 17 years and still does not know whether it was important or not to inform the people of Quebec and Laval of the bribe that he had been offered.

• (1430)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not accurate. The police only confirmed that they do not yet have evidence to indict the Prime Minister; the RCMP did not say whether he was aware of the cover-up scheme.

A dozen PMO staffers, public servants at Privy Council, senior senators, and the head of the Conservative fund were all working to deal with the Duffy disaster. The RCMP confirms the Prime Minister was aware of something.

What was it?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would refer the hon. member to page 72 of the documents that she refers to. There it says that the RCMP has no evidence that the Prime Minister knew anything about this scheme.

What is also very clear is that the Prime Minister took immediate action and ordered his office to assist the RCMP. I contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition, who for 17 years sat on something that could have saved the people of Quebec many years of misery and millions of dollars of grief. He did not think it was important then. He probably still does not think it is important.

That is not the type of leadership Canadians deserve from a government. That is why they have this Prime Minister and this government in office.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP report says that the former director of parliamentary affairs for Senator LeBreton, Christopher Montgomery, advised the Prime Minister's Office not to get involved in the auditing of the senators' expenses. Despite the warnings, the Prime Minister's posse still decided to try to tinker with the facts in the Deloitte report.

Did the Prime Minister, along with his staff, think he was entitled to interfere with the auditing of Senate expenses conducted by a so-called independent firm?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member refers to the same report that I read, and in that report it says that the Prime Minister took immediate action and ordered his office to assist with the RCMP investigation and ordered that all emails pertaining to this matter be held for the RCMP.

That is the standard of leadership that Canadians expect. That is the standard of leadership they got from this Prime Minister. Let us contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition, who for 17 years did not think it was important to inform the police of Quebec that he had been offered a bribe. Then, when it came out in the news that this was happening, he still did not think it was important that he contact the police. He waited for them to contact him.

Real leadership is what the Prime Minister of Canada has shown day in and day out.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the information provided by the RCMP does not indicate that the Prime Minister did not know anything. The RCMP is saying that it does not yet have evidence about the Prime Minister's involvement in every detail, but it confirmed that the Prime Minister did know. This is an important point.

Nigel Wright wrote the following to the Prime Minister's Office staff, and I quote: "Senator LeBreton agrees that Chris might not be fully on board".

Might not be fully on board with what, exactly?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after a number of months of questioning in the House of Commons, after a number of months of investigation by the RCMP, and after having reviewed a number of emails and documents, the RCMP quite clearly says that it is not aware of any evidence that the Prime Minister was involved in the repayment or reimbursement of money to Senator Duffy or his lawyer.

That is right in black and white. They can choose to read other parts of this report, but what is clear is that the Prime Minister did not know. Had he known, he would have in no way endorsed the scheme.

That is why I am proud of the leadership that we show day in and day out. That is why Canadians keep rewarding us with a majority government.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the more they refuse to answer, the deeper they dig themselves in.

On May 14, Carl Vallée, the Prime Minister's press secretary, replied to Andrew MacDougall. According to the RCMP documents, he asked, "Would the PM know the actual answer to the question? Just in case he asks us." To which Wright responded, "The PM knows, in broad terms only, that I personally assisted Duffy...".

On May 21, Vallée tweeted in response to journalists that the Prime Minister had no knowledge whatsoever of Mr. Wright's payment.

Why did Carl Vallée lie to the journalists?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member on one thing: the less a person answers, the bigger the hole the person gets into. Look at the people of Quebec and the hole they have been in because of 17 years of silence by the Leader of the Opposition. Look at the Charbonneau commission and day in and day out what the people of Quebec have had to endure for 17 years of silence from the Leader of the Opposition.

On the opposite side, they have a Prime Minister who took immediate action and has shown leadership and who immediately ordered his office to participate and assist with the RCMP so that the RCMP could have all the information it needed on this matter.

That is real leadership, and that is why I am so proud of this Prime Minister and this government.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives do not understand that the more they refuse to answer, the guiltier they look.

Janice Payne sent an email to Benjamin Perrin about a bigger problem if they did not manage to stop the Deloitte audit. Deloitte is the firm that was to conduct a supposedly independent audit.

What "bigger problem" was she referring to? If they had nothing to hide, why ask party friends at Deloitte to halt or manipulate the audit?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documents quite clearly outline who the subjects of the investigation are. They are Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy. At the same time, the documents show the leadership that the Prime Minister took in ordering his office to assist. They also show that the Prime Minister did not know what was happening with respect to this scheme. As he said on a number of occasions, had he known, he would have in no way endorsed such a scheme.

Oral Questions

The member is quite right, though, that when one does not answer questions, as the Leader of the Opposition did not for 17 years, there are a lot of big problems. I think the people of Quebec understand and do not appreciate the fact that for 17 years he held back the fact that he was given a bribe. That is not real leadership.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, well, that was fun. Let us try a little fact check here.

The Prime Minister said he did not know the details, but the RCMP said he was informed of the broad brush strokes of the scheme. What, then, was he told about the negotiations between Nigel Wright, as chief of staff; Benjamin Perrin, his personal lawyer; Janice Payne, Duffy's lawyer; and senior Conservative Senators Gerstein and Tkachuk to make the payoff and derail an audit investigation?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, what is very clear is that it is Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright who are the subjects of this investigation.

Senator Duffy accepted expenses that he did not incur. He was not entitled to these expenses. At the same time, Nigel Wright repaid those expenses. That was wrong. Nigel Wright has admitted that and is prepared to accept the consequences.

That is another reason Senator Duffy was suspended from the Senate without pay. That is the standard we expect on this side of the House. It is unfortunate that the NDP and the Liberals do not accept the same standards.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us try this again. We are talking about the RCMP affidavits, not fiction here.

According to the RCMP, Senator Irving Gerstein was not only aware of the cover-up plans, he was an active participant. The RCMP says he contacted Deloitte official Michael Runia about stopping the audit into Michael Duffy's rip-off of the taxpayers. It turns out that Michael Runia has donated over \$6,000 to the Conservative Party.

Do the Conservatives think this behaviour is appropriate? What is the Prime Minister going to do to hold his buddy Irving Gerstein to account?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, imagine this gentleman talking about donations when this is the party that accepted \$340,000 worth of illegal union donations. Give me a break. He sits beside a member who made 29 separate donations to the Québec solidaire.

He has a leader who does not think corruption is a big deal and does not report it for 17 years. That leader is sitting beside another person who wants to gerrymander the riding boundaries, who is sitting beside another person who wants to actually break apart the country and who criticizes the brave men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces who have fought in wars.

There are a lot of people on that side who have a lot to answer for. On this side we are—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was tough talk from a man defending bribery, fraud, and corruption in the Prime Minister's Office. Let us try to bring him back to reality.

Benjamin Perrin was the Prime Minister's personal lawyer. RCMP documents reveal that Perrin's emails have been deleted and cannot be examined. The Library and Archives Act states:

No government or ministerial record...shall be disposed of, including by being destroyed, without the written consent of the Librarian and Archivist...

I have a simple question. Did the Prime Minister's Office get that consent before it erased this evidence?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, emails and documents, upon the departure of staff, are managed according to applicable rules, including Treasury Board guidelines. Of course we expect all staff to follow those rules.

• (1440)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to an affidavit sworn by the RCMP, David van Hemmen:

...made all the arrangements for Nigel Wright by dealing directly with Mr. Wright's bank, arranging for a transfer of funds from one account to another, picking up the bank draft in Ottawa, and delivering it to the office of Janice Payne, Senator Duffy's lawyer....

In the real world he would get fired, but instead he was promoted to a senior role with the Minister of State for Finance.

I ask the minister to tell us why David van Hemmen is still being paid by the Canadian taxpayers.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the report quite clearly states that it is Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright who are under investigation.

If the standard was as he says, the entire Liberal caucus would not be in Parliament. They are surrounded by people who broke the Canada Elections Act. There are members in that caucus who were complicit and worked to try to defraud Canadians of \$40 million by funnelling government advertising money to their riding associations. If the member really wants to go down that road, he might look at this own caucus and decide how many would be left of the 31 or 32 members, or whatever it is, if he has that standard.

He should get back to facts. Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy are what this is about.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister of state was asked a question about his personal staff. Why is he unable to even get up to defend his own hiring decisions?

An hon. member: He did not hire him; he was told to hire him.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, we also know now that Chris Woodcock knew about the \$90,000 cheque as of March 8 and that he then took part in covering up a crime. Even so, he was appointed chief of staff to the Minister of Natural Resources. How can the minister trust a person like that?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the report clearly outlines that it was Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright who are the subject of this investigation. Senator Duffy accepted expenses that he was not entitled to accept, and Nigel Wright repaid those expenses. That was inappropriate. He is prepared to accept the consequences. I hope that Senator Duffy will do the same.

I ask it again. The hon. member talked about working with people who have broken the rules and broken the laws. He is surrounded by people. He might want to ask them that very same question.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable for a minister to hire such a person and then refuse to defend that decision when asked a direct question.

The Conservatives protected another staffer, Patrick Rogers. He ordered Mike Duffy to stop co-operating with Deloitte. He was trying to cover up Mr. Duffy's and Mr. Wright's crimes instead of making sure they obeyed the law. Now he is the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages' director of policy. Why did she hire someone who covered up crimes?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the documents released in court yesterday quite clearly show who the investigation is about. It is about Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright.

What the documents also show is a contrast in leadership styles between this Prime Minister and anybody in that caucus. As soon as the Prime Minister knew about this, he ordered his staff to participate, to assist, to hold back any emails. That is unlike the Liberal Party, which when faced with a crisis in its government decided to lie, cheat, and misplace \$40 million, which we still have not found.

I will take this style of leadership, this style of openness, and the leadership given by our Prime Minister day in and day out to anything the Liberals ever have to offer.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been saying for years that Canada is halfway to meeting its 2020 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. However, yesterday, the minister admitted that Canada is only a quarter of the way there. The Conservatives' approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to the Senate is the same: keep the status quo and tell lies.

When will they take action and make major polluters pay?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, exactly the opposite is true; our approach is working. Thanks to our actions, carbon emissions will actually go down close to 130 megatonnes from what they would have been under the Liberals.

Now let us contrast our approach with the NDP approach. Its approach would be a \$20 billion carbon tax. Let us take a look at what this would do to hard-working Canadian families. It would be a tax on electricity, a tax on transportation, a tax on heating their homes, a tax on clothes and groceries for their kids, and the list goes on.

What we know is that our approach is working and Canadians do not want a \$20 billion carbon tax from the NDP.

● (1445)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all that hot air from the parliamentary secretary is not going to help us reduce emissions.

One would think that if a past environment minister had to make up numbers to prove to the world that Canada is taking action on climate change, the present one would actually act. Instead, the minister's most notable contribution to her first climate change conference was to demotivate global action on climate change so much so that civil society walked out of the talks today.

Do the Conservatives understand that it is their actions that made the international community leave those talks?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the opposite is true. Our government has taken a leadership role to international climate change efforts. We have been clear that any international agreement must be fair and effective and include commitments by all major emitters.

That said, Canadians will be proud to know that our leadership on the world stage is being recognized by our international partners. Just yesterday, after concluding Canada's national statement at COP 19, the minister was approached by an Angolan representative, who personally thanked her for Canada's efforts.

Our government is committed to protecting the environment. We are committed and we will get results—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, five months ago the government refused the NDP's request to work together to improve rail safety. This week, the Minister of Transport finally took a step forward, but Canadians will only be warned after the dangerous cargo has already rolled through town, and rail companies' safety protocols are still kept secret.

Oral Questions

Why will the Conservative government not tell municipalities before the trains arrive, what is in them and what safety measures are in place? What is there to hide?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, this minister issued a protective directive directing rail companies to share information with municipalities. It ensures that companies who transport dangerous goods provide municipalities with information on the nature and volume of dangerous goods the company transports by rail through that municipality.

We did that by working with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which said that the protective direction “sends a clear message that the Government of Canada fully agrees that local governments need to know basic information about dangerous goods being transported through their communities”. That was from the president of FCM.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they always come up with half measures. The Minister of Transport should implement all the Auditor General's recommendations. She has taken a step in the right direction by requiring the transmission of information about dangerous goods being transported through municipalities. However, it would be much better to have the information before the trains travel through town, not after. What is more, there still is no deadline for the phase-out of the DOT-111 tank cars that are deemed unsafe.

Will the Minister finally work with us to put in place a real policy for rail safety ?

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member would know that the minister and this government have been taking consistent action in light of the tragedy at Lac-Mégantic with new protective orders with respect to the testing and classification of crude oil products, and the communication of that important information; emergency directives on the transportation of dangerous goods by rail; and now a new protective directive on information-sharing with municipalities. All of that was done with our partners in the provinces and the FCM.

It is the FCM that said very clearly, “the federal government have now responded, and we commend them for it”.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the only party that stands up for the rights of law-abiding hunters, farmers, and sport shooters is the Conservative Party. We have passed legislation to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and delete all of the records. However, today the Supreme Court decided to hear the Government of Quebec's attempt to hold on to the outdated and useless data.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the government's position on this matter?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Medicine Hat, Alberta, for her excellent question.

We accept the Supreme Court's decision, and we will continue to put in place measures to make our streets safer. We will also respect our hunters, farmers and sports shooters.

● (1450)

[English]

We will vigorously defend our legislation, which was passed by the elected members of this Parliament and the Supreme Court.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the Chief of the Defence Staff said that when it comes to cuts in the size of the regular force, “direction has not been given to us yet”.

The government once promised 75,000 regular force members and 35,000 reservists. We are not close to that now.

Can the minister confirm if the number of uniformed members of the Canadian Armed Forces will be cut?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot. Budget 2012 states that we will maintain CAF regular force strength at 68,000 and reserve force strength at 27,000.

All the cuts that the member was talking about were done by the Liberals and supported by the NDP. That is what I think he is referring to.

[Translation]

Ms. Éloise Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course, we still do not have an answer.

The Chief of Defence Staff has not been given clear direction on closing military bases or reducing the size of the Canadian Armed Forces in order for the Conservatives to balance the budget in time for the election. There is total confusion, and the Minister of National Defence is to blame. Soldiers in Valcartier and their families want answers. Will the government close bases or facilities or not? If so, which ones?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, bases that were cut were done by the Liberals and supported by the NDP.

The member talks about confusion. The confusion is all within that caucus.

The Chief of the Defence Staff stated, “Certainly the government has not indicated a desire to cut numbers.” As a matter of fact, as I indicated in budget 2012, the force strength will be at 68,000 and the reserve strength at 27,000.

We will support our men and women in the armed forces.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not just military personnel who want an explanation; veterans want one, too. The Conservatives' new disability allowance system discriminates against hundreds of veterans.

Instead of taking action and helping veterans, the Minister of Veterans Affairs is asking a committee to clarify the government's legal obligations to veterans. Instead of worrying about their legal obligations, the Conservatives should be worrying about their moral obligations. Will the minister improve the disability allowance system?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that no matter what one does to improve the quality of life and support for veterans and their families, that member is obviously not on side.

This is certainly a move that we are making to enhance the quality of life and support for our veterans. The member can contribute to that ongoing effort if she wishes, as we have done all along.

The comprehensive review of the new veterans charter is a step forward. It is a continuation of our good work, which over the last five or six years has added some \$5 billion in programs and services for our veterans and their families.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by the time all Canadians go to bed tonight, we will lose 150 World War II, Korean, and modern-day veterans either to illness or through the aging process. Two-thirds of those impoverished veterans and their families will not qualify for the Last Post Fund because the litmus test is still at \$12,000 for the entry level. That is what the Liberals gave us back in 1995; before that it was \$24,000. Twenty years later it is still at \$12,000.

Allowing these families and the heroes of our country to have a dignified burial and cremation service is the last chance for a grateful nation to say “goodbye and thank you”. Will the government now raise that litmus test so that more veterans and their families can have the dignified service they so rightly deserve?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and his demonstrated concern for the welfare of our veterans and their families.

I also thank the Parliamentary Budget Officer for highlighting how our government doubled the financial limit of the funeral and burial program. We will continue to work with veterans' groups to ensure the Canadian funeral and burial program remains one of the most generous of our allies.

I urge the hon. member and all interested parties, who can in fact contribute to any changes they would wish to make, to appear in front of the parliamentary committee delving into the new veterans charter.

● (1455)

ETHICS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the Prime Minister's lawyer, Benjamin Perrin, assured Nigel Wright there would be no written evidence of the deal to repay Mike Duffy's fraudulent expenses.

When a lawyer does not want something put on paper, it is because he or she has something to hide. In this case, it was the fraud squad's job to wipe the Prime Minister's fingerprints off the deal.

The Prime Minister can no longer pretend he did not know what all his senior staff were up to. When will he finally tell Canadians the truth, 17 years from now?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, finally, we can agree on something. It was extraordinarily inappropriate for the Leader of the Opposition to wait 17 years to talk about a bribe that he was offered.

I am usually, of course, very critical of this member's questions and that still remains the same, but at least on that one point we agree. The Leader of the Opposition should not have waited 17 years to disclose that he was offered a bribe. He could have saved the people of Quebec so many years of misery. That is not the standard of leadership Canadians expect. That is why this Prime Minister is in office today and will be for a long time to come.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the PMO under RCMP investigation, court filings show that the Prime Minister's claim that no one in his office was informed about the Wright-Duffy deal is patently false.

His entire senior staff appears to be one big fraud squad: Woodcock, Rogers, van Hemmen, Hilton, Hamilton, and, of course, Conservative senators Gerstein, Tkachuk, Stewart Olsen, and LeBreton.

If the Prime Minister is truly angry about this scandal, why do all of these people still have their jobs?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, and as the report clearly outlines, the Prime Minister showed incredible leadership. The moment he found about this, he went into his office and ordered that his office and the PMO cooperate, that all emails be preserved and that they assist the RCMP in this investigation. That is the standard of leadership that Canadians expect. That is the standard of leadership they got from this Prime Minister.

At the same time, this is about Nigel Wright. As these documents completely show, it is about Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy. The Prime Minister did not know about this. Had he known about it, he would have never endorsed such a scheme.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is a standard of leadership. A billion litres of toxic coal slurry was released into the Athabasca River from an abandoned coal mine.

The federal government is responsible for regulating industrial facilities to prevent such catastrophic incidents. The obvious response to a disaster of this scale is to ensure no other industrial facilities along this river pose similar risks.

Has the government taken immediate action to ensure no such incidents occur, including in the oil sands?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not think this is a laughing matter. Environment Canada is supporting the province and providing assistance as required. Our government has committed to enshrining the polluter pay system into law. Environment Canada's enforcement officers are looking into the situation. Our government will continue to take action against those who break environmental laws.

An hon. member: What did the Angolans say?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I am standing here and they are mocking a third world country. It is upsetting when we look at the environment. This is something that we take seriously. We spent \$1.2 billion helping countries around the world and that is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, looking into the situation is not good enough.

The federal government has clear responsibility over the protection of fisheries and northern and transboundary waters. We do not want to wait for Alberta. The disaster is already impacting communities downstream from the site of the spill. Monitoring the situation is not good enough.

When will enforcement action be carried out by the government? What is Environment Canada doing to protect the people in the Mackenzie Basin?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting our environment and we are beefing up, if that member was paying attention, environmental laws. We are setting a higher safety standard and creating mandatory minimum sentences for individuals who violate environmental laws.

As I have said, it is our government that has committed to enshrining the polluter pay system into law and will continue to take action against those who break the environmental laws. If the New Democrats actually believed in this, it would be nice if they would actually vote in support of our government in these actions.

● (1500)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, the Liberal MP for Westmount—Ville-Marie urged Canada to jeopardize its security and military relationship with the United States, yet that was the same Liberal Party that had no issue with the fact that our Canadian Armed Forces would be exposed to cluster munitions in Afghanistan simply by working on joint missions with the United States. The Liberals cannot have it both ways.

On this side of the House, we understand the importance of taking real action on the destruction of cluster munitions, while at the same time never wavering from our commitment to the men and women in uniform.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please comment on the government's response to rid the world of cluster munitions?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very surprised that the Liberal Party wanted to abandon our partnership with the Obama administration for world peace and security. That is terribly disturbing.

I am also proud to say that Canada has never used or produced cluster munitions. As part of our leadership on this issue, not only will we fully ratify and honour all the obligations in the cluster munitions treaty, we will also spend \$10 million over the next 18 months to support assistance in demining efforts of these terrible weapons.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Jenni Byrne is the deputy chief of staff to the Prime Minister. While she is holed up in a motel or hotel in Brandon for the byelection, she is no stranger to the executing of deceptive phone campaigns. Things are going so well in the Prime Minister's Office that I guess he does not need his deputy chief of staff in Ottawa.

What public business is Jenni Byrne conducting in Brandon? Is she reporting to Elections Canada twice daily under her daily routine?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that would be too easy, since that member is surrounded by people who have broken the rules. He is surrounded by people who have broken the Canada Elections Act. He is surrounded by members who have been charged of robocalls. We know the Liberals are only talking of Brandon—Souris today, but come next week, they will not talk about it at all.

I think the people of Brandon—Souris believe what the people of my riding do. They want lower taxes; they will get that with a Conservative. They do not want a gun registry; they will get that with a Conservative. They want marketing freedom for their farmers; they will get that with a Conservative. They are proud of democracy; they will get that with the Conservatives.

On every issue that matters, it is the Conservatives who will always stand up for the people of Brandon—Souris, not the pretend Liberals.

*Points of Order***GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, work has stopped on retrofits and development at Seaforth Armoury in Vancouver. Subcontractors who started work more than six months ago still have not been paid for what should have been a straightforward government contract. These are hard-working, independent business owners being forced into financial hardship and forced to walk off the job.

Will the minister take responsibility for work done for her department and ensure these contractors are paid?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously we want to ensure that all employees right across the country are paid according to the rules. In certain cases, there are situations where there are subcontractors who must rely on the integrity of their employers to do the right thing. We will do everything we can to ensure those contractors do so.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Lac-Mégantic tragedy shook the country. The situation required a targeted response from Canada. Everyone agreed that decontamination was a priority and that we needed to work together to rebuild.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister tell the House what has been done to help this community get back on its feet?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the fine work she does here in the House.

Today, the Prime Minister announced additional help for the town and people of Lac-Mégantic. We have always said that we will be there for the people of Lac-Mégantic and, today, we are once again demonstrating that commitment. This new funding will help decontaminate affected sites so that the community can rebuild. We are taking measures to ensure that those responsible for such incidents pay the price, and we will continue to work to improve rail safety in Canada.

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● (1505)

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives want to remove any reference to the notions of climate change and the environment by changing the National Capital Commission's environmental plan.

They will plant trees instead of being carbon neutral. They will abolish the objective of providing leadership in understanding likely climate change impacts on the region, home to thousands of families.

They are convinced that they will reduce greenhouse gases by 30%, but if the NCC no longer maintains a greenhouse gas emission

inventory, how will it be able to know by what percentage these emissions have been reduced?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Capital Commission does a phenomenal job at managing not only Gatineau Park, but the greenbelt on the Ottawa side of the Ottawa River.

It has numerous initiatives for responsible environmental policies and responsible environmental management. We have a lot of confidence that it will continue to do an extraordinary job managing these important assets, not just in the national capital regional but they are the pride of all Canadians.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this week Thunder Bay's city council voted unanimously to condemn the closure of the Veterans Affairs offices in Thunder Bay and across Canada.

Mayor Keith Hobbs called this abandonment of our veterans shameful. I have received hundreds of messages from those who are revolted by the shoddy treatment of our veterans.

Will the Conservatives please listen to the residents of Thunder Bay—Superior North and reverse these closures?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seriously injured veterans do not have to leave their homes. We will visit them at their homes. In fact, we will cut their grass, clean their homes, and shovel their snow.

We are doing a fabulous job for veterans in support of them. The feedback I get is that Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian people are looking after them.

Sure, there are more things to be done, and that is why we are having the review of the charter.

The Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, I know all members will be very excited this weekend to take in the 101st Grey Cup. I know the House probably has divided loyalties, but for the rest of the day as we sit here and contemplate, let us think of the foresight and, indeed, maybe providential choice by the Fathers of Confederation to choose green to be the colour of the House of Commons.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, good luck this weekend with that.

I would be remiss if I did not stand on this point of order. In response to one of his questions, one of the non-answers given by the parliamentary secretary misled the House. He said that our party had not raised the issue of veterans affairs, when, in fact, I stood in the House myself and talked about the closure of the offices in Sydney. I ask—

Government Orders

The Speaker: Order, please. This sounds like a continuation of debate.

I see the hon. member for Hamilton Centre rising. I will recognize him with a certain degree of reluctance.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine why. With the greatest of respect, I certainly cannot challenge your opinion or authority, but it needs to be said here on the floor, as we head into this weekend: oskee wee wee.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you have only yourself to blame for that one, I am sorry to say.

The questions this week, looking forward to government business, are a bit complicated in that there have been so many scandals floating around the federal government and other right-wing governments across the country, particularly in Toronto, that it has been difficult to keep up with the actual business of the House.

Traditionally, right up until the very last general election, it was always the practice of this place to have the parties consult constructively on what could be done in Canada's House of Commons. That practice has utterly vanished under the current government.

[*Translation*]

Even when the opposition suggests passing legislation quickly, the government refuses our co-operation. It is really strange and contrary to the practices of this place.

Today for instance, we could have easily passed an important bill on air and sea transport, Bill C-3, as well as a bill on offshore health and safety, Bill C-5, and sent them to committee. Some members still wanted to speak to those bills, but I am sure they both could have been sent to their respective committees if we had debated them today.

• (1510)

[*English*]

Instead of allowing for the debate and passage of these two very important bills, which the government has said are critical, it has chosen not to take the course that would allow Parliament to do its job and effectively pass legislation, which it is constantly demanding and forcing when it feels as though it does not have its way. Instead of debating those bills, to which we have some agreement, the government has chosen from its order one of the most ideologically motivated bills I have ever seen. It is a bill that the opposition parties are united in opposition against.

I would add some causal note to this that while those of us on the New Democratic side are against this bill and stand and speak to it, the Liberal opposition way is to just utter its misgivings about the bill. Its members have chosen never to rise and address the actual issues. That is their choice, not ours, on this partisan attack against science.

All the same, I would love to know when we can get back to Bills C-3 and C-5 so that these important bills can make their way to committee for further study and investigation by experts and be one step closer to becoming law in Canada.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, I can attest that I and our government find it regrettable, to say the very least, that we hear comments such as this from the House leader of the official opposition when, in fact, the opposition members themselves are delaying important pieces of legislation through the continuance of filibustering and delaying tactics here in the House and at committee.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you and the opposition House leader that we will continue debating the NDP's regrettable amendment to block second reading of Bill C-2, the respect for communities act. However, if the opposition members finally allow some progress on that critical file, we will turn to Bill C-3, the safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act, at second reading.

Tomorrow we will start the second reading debate on Bill C-12, the drug-free prisons act.

Monday, before question period, we will resume the second reading debate on Bill C-5, the offshore health and safety act. After question period, we will return to Bill C-12.

On Wednesday, we will start the second reading debate on Bill C-13, the protecting Canadians from online crime act.

That debate will continue on Thursday, but if we cannot finish Bill C-2 today, we will make time for that debate on Thursday morning.

Tuesday, November 26, as the government House leader announced earlier in the week, will be the fourth allotted day, which will see a Liberal motion debated.

During the constituency week, the member for Papineau certainly put forward a number of unusual ideas, some of which, or maybe one of which, may be put forward as a motion for the Liberals' allotted day. Some of those unusual ideas include the member for Papineau, the leader of the third party, saying that he admired the dictatorship in Communist China. He also advocated to minors the legalization of drugs. Finally, the leader seemed to suggest that he is putting the interests of criminals ahead of those of their victims by reducing sentences for serious crimes.

We find that reprehensible, but we have yet to see how the Liberals will approach those very important issues, in the eyes of the Liberals, come their allotted day next Tuesday.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Government Orders

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has five minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will take the first 30 seconds to congratulate him and the great province of Saskatchewan on its future victory over the Ticats. I can say that we were not whipped on this side of the House. I send my condolences to my colleagues from the great city of Hamilton, as well, but congratulations to the Ticats for even getting there.

I will come back to the serious issue of InSite in British Columbia, the safe injection site. It is an extremely serious issue. As I said prior to question period, the men and women who find themselves at the bottom of the ladder, as we say, in the deepest hole they can find themselves in, who have unfortunately turned to intravenous drugs, or drugs of any kind, are in a really desperate situation.

What these sites do is take these men and women in and allow them to continue that habit while hopefully giving them the counselling and the means to be get off the drugs so that they can realize that life is beautiful, that they have worth and are loved, and that they and their families can live normal lives.

If we do not do that, they will end up under bridges. They will end up in the back alleys and everywhere. I should know. I grew up in British Columbia, in the Lower Mainland. I saw the east end of Vancouver.

Again, I go back to my colleague from Vancouver East, our representative there for the last 16 and a half years, and my colleagues from the Lower Mainland. They know what we are talking about. The reality is that this site is really a godsend to these people. It is a beacon of hope and trust.

I understand the Conservative philosophy. They do not like the idea of people using illegal drugs. That is also our philosophy. However, we have a great divide on how we react and how we treat people who use drugs. They look more at the criminal aspect of it, and we look more at the health aspect of it. That is the difference between the Conservatives and the NDP.

We encourage all people not to use intravenous or illegal drugs of any kind, ever. That is a wishful thing to say. As long as we have been on this planet, people have somehow managed to abuse themselves in particular circumstances for a variety of reasons.

There is only one person who can judge those individuals, and that person has a lot higher standing than me. It is simply not for me or anybody in this House of Commons to do that. These people are human beings. They have worth. They have lives. At one time, they had mothers and fathers who loved them. For whatever reason, they found themselves in a very terrible and unfortunate situation.

We on this side of the House are very concerned about the legislation coming forward, not necessary because of what the government is trying to say but because of the ulterior motives behind it. We understand how the Conservatives work in legislation. The devil is always in the details. What is the real motive for their doing this?

If the bill gets to committee, we will be able to examine it very carefully and get witnesses in. The government will hear not just

from members of Parliament. They will actually hear from people whose lives were saved by InSite and safe injection sites.

With that, I thank the House for the opportunity to speak on this important issue. Mr. Speaker, I wish you the very best this weekend.

• (1515)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would really like to hear an opinion from the parliamentarian of the year, and congratulations to him, on whether, like many on the opposite side of the House, he feels that those unfortunate individuals who are poor and disadvantaged, have had bad luck, and have then turned to drugs to ease the pain, should be further marginalized and criminalized.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague and my personal friend very much for a very important question.

We are not to judge how a person ends up there. The reality is that these people have worth. As a Canadian society, as a society that cares for one another, we should be looking at these individuals and not judging them.

What we should be doing is taking the opportunity to work with them and help them, not only on the medical side but on the social side and the religious or spiritual side or whatever one wants to call it. If we do that, can give them a leg up, and help them be productive citizens in our society and feel that they have worth, in turn they will become advocates for other people who may find themselves in that situation. That would indeed be a good thing.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud my colleague's commitment to humanity. This is just another example of the issues that matter to him and certainly to those of us on this end of the House.

The whole issue of harm reduction has been talked about for probably the last 20 years. The clinic is just one example of what harm reduction is all about. It tries to help people who clearly have tried to get help, and it has not worked. This is a way of offering them a chance to be part of the human race by getting them the help they need and treating them like the human beings they are.

I appreciate the positive comments from my colleague, but I would like to know if there is any interest in the community he represents that harm reduction opportunities be provided.

• (1520)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, as you know, my community is much smaller than Vancouver or Toronto. I thank my colleague from York West for that important question.

We do it in a different manner. We do not have the population base or that type of visible intravenous drug use on our streets. There are homeless people, do not get me wrong, and we know what some of them may be up to, but there is simply not that large a population in that regard.

Usually what happens in a particular case of that nature is that shelters, such as the Salvation Army, Phoenix, Adsum House, Beacon House, and all these organizations, assist these individuals to try to give them a lift up. However, my community just does not have the sort of problem that exists in Toronto and Vancouver.

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[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the debate on Bill C-2, it is crucial that we focus on the benefits of supervised injection sites like InSite, which has achieved many things.

What would my colleague say are the benefits of having such a site in Canada?

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: With a question like that, Mr. Speaker, there is no question that this member from Quebec will be a long-time member of Parliament in the House of Commons.

She is so right. It gets people off the streets, out from under bridges, out of abandoned trailers, out of the back alleys, and out of the holes and ditches they find themselves in. It gets them into a safe, warm, and loving environment. While there, they get the medical help and counselling they need. That is the human approach to assisting those who end up that way.

I ask everybody here who has children, what if it is one of their children who ends up in that situation? Would members throw them in jail? Would they punish them, or would they hug them, show them the love, and give them the help they need? I ask that as a father of two children. I have been blessed with my children, but I know people whose children, unfortunately, have had very difficult and challenging times. When that happens, that is when the hand of friendship, the hand of humanity, what we call social democratic values, reach in, lift those people up, give them the help and guidance they need, and show them the love they require.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in this difficult but important debate. It is worth noting that InSite as a program has been peer reviewed around the world. There were further studies on over 70 other safe injection sites in Europe and Australia. The fact is that it saved lives. That is exactly what we are talking about, saving the lives of Canadians.

My friend from Sackville—Eastern Shore talked about the impact on families and how we did not have to walk too far before we ran into either immediate or extended family members who had been affected by addiction. If we could just hold our breath, click our heels and make this problem go away, we would not be here, but we cannot.

These kinds of drugs bring evil upon those who succumb to addiction, as well as those around them. For every person who is at InSite, how many family members, friends and others who love that individual are hurting?

I served on the municipal council. I get it. I get NIMBY, not in my backyard. Sometimes it can be a plotted and deliberate thing, but most often it is just ordinary people who are living their lives and going to work. Suddenly something happens down the street and impacts their lives, and they react. Guess what? Their first thought is for the very kinds of children that we are talking about in other families who need and want love. Their first reaction is to protect their own, and that is totally understandable.

However, as we have shown in Canada, there are ways to approach these issues. Municipalities are given the responsibility to determine where things go in a community, what the best land use is and what the best mixed use is. Quite frankly, NIMBY applied to this issue means that it is not going to happen anywhere, and more Canadians will die.

We are one of the countries that is leading to show that a compassionate, responsible country can find a way to deal with these things, recognizing and accepting the challenges that facilities like that usually create in our urban centres. We recognize that a larger purpose has to apply.

I want to read something into the record. Let us remember that the government is bringing in a new law because the Supreme Court said it had to when it refused to extend the original program. Basically, as far as the official opposition is concerned, this legislation is merely a nice way of just saying no. That is not acceptable for us in the NDP.

It is also not acceptable for the Supreme Court of Canada or Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin. I defy any member of the government to stand and say that this is somebody who does not care about Canada, crime, issues, or those things. They can go ahead, make that case, and let us hear it. That is what the Conservatives are accusing us of doing.

This is what the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, a G7 nation and arguably the best country in the world to live in, said about the action of the government minister who denied the extension of InSite. This will give us some insight into the government's motivation.

● (1525)

The Supreme Court said:

The infringement at stake is serious; it threatens the health, indeed the lives, of the claimants and others like them. The grave consequences that might result from a lapse in the current constitutional exemption for Insite cannot be ignored...It is also grossly disproportionate: the potential denial of health services and the correlative increase in the risk of death and disease to injection drug users outweigh any benefit that might be derived from maintaining an absolute prohibition on possession of illegal drugs on Insite's premises.

That is exactly where the government is.

It further said:

The effect of denying the services of Insite to the population it serves...is grossly disproportionate to any benefit that Canada might derive from presenting a uniform stance on the possession of narcotics.

That means, just saying no is not good enough.

We are mounting as strong an opposition to this as we can. It is not because we have any desire to see or assist individuals in harming themselves; it is quite the opposite.

Collectively, we are grappling. Those nations that are compassionate and have the means like ours to deal with these issues, as opposed to just providing food, security and a roof over the head of their population, is a luxury we have and the direction we were heading. It took quite a while for the Liberals when they were in government to come on side and allow the exemption, but they got there. However, now we are running headlong into the ideology of the hard right element in the current Conservative government.

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I read those quotes from the Supreme Court of Canada chief justice as my response to those members who, not necessarily today but in previous debates, accused members of the opposition of all kinds of horrible things in terms of not caring. The issue is not about caring really; the issue is the responsibility we have as lawmakers to bring in the best laws we can.

InSite works to the extent that it is saving lives. It has been peer reviewed. It is similar to other initiatives in other G7 countries. All the studies show that this is the way to go. Is it perfect? No. Would we like to just close our eyes, click our heels and make it go away? Yes. Is that going to happen? No.

We have two choices.

We can take the approach of the government and just flatly say no and then use the rhetoric of politics to play that out and accuse and hurl accusations over here that we are all somehow secretly supporting those who are addicted to drugs. I am not going to comment anymore on that thought.

The other choice, rather than to say no, is to be grown up about it and realize that we have a life-and-death issue where the easy politics, which is to just say no, do not work. We need to find a way to come to grips with this, mitigate as much as we can any impact on our communities, of course, and recognize, as the Supreme Court of Canada has, that there is a higher obligation here.

Just saying no does not make it okay in terms of the number of people who have died and will die if this site is not there. We will do everything we can to stop this wrong-headed bill and advocate for a progressive, compassionate, human approach that deals with the problem rather than hiding behind political rhetoric.

• (1530)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened intently here and in the lobby to my colleague's speech.

Something that is missed is that supervised injection sites do not provide drugs to the folks who go there. Addicts buy these drugs on the street from dealers and that money goes directly to organized crime, which I do not think anybody supports.

Through the bill, we are simply trying to provide the Minister of Health with some documentation from the local community and the local police force that says they support that.

Since the New Democrats will obviously oppose that community involvement with this project, is it their position that these sites should not only be approved without such consultations, but that they should also provide dangerous and addictive drugs like heroin to these people?

Mr. David Christopherson: That is an interesting approach, Mr. Speaker.

First my thought was, as the hon. member was speaking, that he thinks that all of a sudden those drugs would not be bought because people who use them do not have somewhere safe to go. It does not make sense. It does not deal with that issue. Those drugs will be bought, agreed. The question is this: will we provide a compassionate environment that allows them to at least try to live, or will we just send them off into the alleyway to crawl into the darkness and what, die? That is an alternative? We say no.

The last thing is that I am informed by my colleagues from British Columbia that the CMA and even the local police are on side with this. They are the ones who have to deal with the repercussions with what happens if we do not have InSite.

• (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to make note of the wonderful example of how a federation can work when we get a national government working alongside the provincial and municipal governments and the many different stakeholders that were involved in turning Insite into a reality. All of them should be applauded for their efforts.

That said, through years now, InSite has demonstrated to be hugely successful, not only for the people in direct need, but also for the community in which it is located. It has made the community a healthier, safer community to live. All the stakeholders tell us that this is the case and that we need to sustain it.

Would the member comment on why one easily gets frustrated with the government when it seems to want to toss aside science or facts when it brings in legislation such as this?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I have been at a couple of committee meetings lately. I have not had a chance to agree with him much. I will take the opportunity now to say that I do, very much.

I have served, like my colleague, not just here, but provincially, and I am not sure if he served municipally. Provinces deal with a lot of municipal issues because municipalities only exist by virtue of provincial legislation.

I agree with him entirely. The shame of it is that when we are here at the federal level, these issues seem awfully far away, yet by not providing framework and using legislation that is a federal responsibility, it leaves the provinces with less ability to do anything. It certainly leaves those municipalities that have to deal with the fact that people are dying in their communities, and they would like to do something about it. When they turn to the province, it says it is willing to get on board with the municipality, but it needs the feds.

There are an awful lot of examples of things that are only properly dealt with when we have the co-operation my hon. friend talks about between the federal, provincial, and municipal levels, but in so many cases, the feds have to provide the leadership.

First, the federal government has more means to money and access, but also a lot of the legislation. In this case, it is federal legislation that allows whether that can exist, because we are bumping up against the Criminal Code.

In order for municipalities, the ones that are grappling with this day by day and looking these individuals in the eye, rather than them being left alone, leadership could and should be provided from the federal level to bring those other two partners together so we can work together.

They are Canadians. It does not matter whether we are talking municipal, provincial or federal governance for them, they are Canadians.

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Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I start I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the member from Hamilton, not only for an insightful addition to this debate but also for the passion and the compassion that he brings to the debate, qualities that are so lacking on the other side.

So unwilling are Conservatives to defend this legislation that they will not speak to it. Time and time again an opportunity comes to speak to the bill and to justify their actions today and the day previously, but they stay silent. They have nothing to say.

Here is the challenge for them: it is that they have no evidence to support the decisions they are making in this legislation. It has become so cynical for the Conservatives that the first and virtually only thing they did after writing the bill was to use it as a fundraiser. They drafted legislation that negatively affects Canadian society, municipalities, and the police forces that do their work on our behalf, and then immediately sent out a fundraiser to raise funds for the Conservative Party.

That is what they use Parliament for. That is what they think legislation and law-making has become. It is to raise a few more bucks.

That is what they have done with the bill. They do not debate it. They do not defend it. They do not offer up any evidence.

One would think that a party that says it is interested in good governance and providing some sort of sanity in the way we make policies would have one scrap, one piece of paper in this place that produces so much paper, that would actually identify why they think this is a good idea and what is it based upon.

Let us deal with some of the facts.

Such radicals as the Canadian Medical Association think that safe injection sites work. Such radicals as the Nurses Association have testified that the bill is bad for Canada, along with such radicals as conservative and progressive mayors consistently in the city of Vancouver, which has the only safe injection site in Canada. Those people, regardless of their political affiliation, have taken up this cause and realize that harm reduction can only happen if we practise harm reduction.

The Conservatives take a knee-jerk ideological approach to this issue with no compassion whatsoever. They yammer and they heckle across the way, but they do not have anything to support their view on this issue. All they have is some cynical, cheap attempt to win a few votes and get some cheap dollars in a fundraising initiative, rather than supporting the city of Vancouver, British Columbia as a province, and the other municipalities that are looking to grapple with this intractable issue of drug abuse and addiction in our communities because their path has not worked so far.

We know that addiction rates drop at two times the level for those who have participated in the InSite program in Vancouver. If the Conservatives are actually interested in getting drugs off our streets, why not clean up the addicts? Why not help them out? We know this program works to do that. Why not do it? Do they have a better suggestion?

Of course they do not. Their suggestion is to put them in prisons, where they have six times the access to illegal drugs that they would have on the street. That is the Conservatives' agenda. That is the result of the Conservatives' agenda.

Those are facts. The Conservatives are entitled to their opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts. Those are the facts of the matter. There has been a one-third drop in the rate of death due to overdose in the city of Vancouver over the last 10 years since this program has started. There are 35% fewer people dying as a result of drug overdose, and the Conservatives talk about standing up for communities and protecting communities.

Which communities are they talking about? Are they talking about any of those people who are likely to die as a result of shutting down and preventing any safe injection sites? Those folks do not count as community. They are not Canadians. They do not matter in the Conservatives' world.

It is a deeply cynical point of view. It points to a government that is so wedded to an ideology that it refuses to listen to anybody, including doctors, police, nurses, and municipal leaders of this country. All of those people do not matter in the mix in creating the bill, none of them.

One would think that one Conservative would get up here today and offer some sort of fact-based decision-making. Conservatives decide on something based on their ideology and then present legislation that is only intended to raise money. It is only intended to wedge out a few more votes for their cynical purposes rather than to deal with the issue at hand.

If they want to deal with drug addiction in this country, then let us deal with it.

Conservatives defy the Supreme Court of Canada in its ruling. So much for respect for the courts. The Supreme Court ordered the government to do something about this, and it has done the opposite. It is disgraceful.

There is not right and left on this one, there is right and wrong. The Conservatives are wrong on the bill. New Democrats will stand up against them every single time.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his very heartfelt, convincing and compassionate speech.

Can he explain how keeping supervised injection sites open will make our streets and neighbourhoods safer, and most of all, minimize the number of victims?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Once again, the Conservatives have no opinion and no evidence, and they are remaining silent because they have no arguments against our position. However, it is absolutely clear that the number of victims can be reduced, not only in terms of the people directly involved, but also their families and their communities, which are also the victims of drug abuse.

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As for whether we need to talk to people in the community, the NDP believes that yes, we do, but with compassion and taking into account the scientific evidence, not with cynicism, like the Conservatives do, although today they remain silent.

The Conservatives say they oppose drugs. Okay, but I would like them to give me an example, because no Conservative voices have been heard today; it has been radio silence.

• (1545)

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his very passionate remarks.

What worries me is that the Conservatives have decided to refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security instead of to the Standing Committee on Health.

When I read the bill, I felt that it was mostly about the health of patients and victims. We are talking about drug addiction and people who need health care. Safe injection sites are health care sites.

I also see that the Conservatives are trying to scare the public. Sending the bill to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security is like saying that people should really watch out because this is a safety issue.

Could the hon. member comment on this issue? I feel the Conservatives are trying to scare the public about safe injection sites in a backhanded way.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' argument is clearly a lie.

The safe injection site works well and helps victims and families a great deal. What is more, it has the support of the police, doctors and leaders in the municipality. Those people support it because it works. This is a very difficult issue.

A bill like this is unbelievable to me, just like the government's cynicism. The government is just trying to raise funds because it has no support.

If the government is looking for a voice for communities, we recommend listening to the voices of the Vancouver community, particularly those of the Vancouver police, Canadian doctors and all those who feel they can contribute to solving the problem. It is unfortunate because this is a terrible problem for individuals and communities. All voices must be heard, not just the ideological voice of the Conservatives.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before giving my speech, I want to point out that this debate unfortunately has to be take place because a Conservative bill has been introduced.

This week is Drug Awareness Week in Quebec. If we have to have this debate, this week is a good time to do it.

During this awareness week, there was a morning program on Radio-Canada. Three young women roughly my age were talking about their problems with addiction, with substance abuse. These utterly brilliant, committed and dynamic young women unfortunately became addicted to drugs. Fortunately, they had the support of their families. Their families and their friends managed to help them

overcome their addiction. They had the support of their communities and their families. That is unfortunately not the case for everyone.

All too often, people addicted to drugs have no family to support them. Too often, they live in the street and sleep in emergency shelters. That is why it is important to have centres like InSite. There they are not viewed as bad people. Yes, they use drugs. Drug use is an indictable offence. I am aware of that. However, I must say that addiction goes far beyond that. People should not be thrown onto the street because they are addicted to an illegal substance. InSite is important because it provides a place where those people feel accepted. The staff there want to help them overcome their addiction.

Coming back to the example of the three women who gave an interview to promote Drug Awareness Week, they all have a future; these are incredible women. They have the courage to speak publicly about their personal substance abuse problems. I know that many other women and men, young people, are in the same situation, and they all have lives to lead. If we give them hope, if we welcome them, if we give them the health care they need, we can help them escape the cycle of addiction. As a society, we have a duty to try.

Thanks to InSite, 1.7% of users are more likely to go further, to OnSite, where they can get treatment to overcome their addiction. It is not easy to overcome an addiction to drugs, particularly hard drugs. Users have to be assisted by people who are well trained and very patient. In addition, people who receive care need a lot of courage to say they are ready to go into treatment to overcome their addiction. To have that courage, they need a place where they feel comfortable, where they do not feel rejected by society, but rather accepted. When they feel accepted, when they feel that someone is listening to them and when they know that people will take care of them, it is easier for them to ask for services.

That is exactly what InSite does. Of course, it is an injection site, but it is also a health care centre for users, and who knows, perhaps one day that will enable them to overcome their addiction problem. That is the ultimate objective. The ultimate objective is not for people to continue using hard drugs, but for us to be able to help them overcome their addiction problem.

• (1550)

This Conservative bill is too short-sighted. We notice this problem frequently with this government. It thinks only about the immediate future. It says it does not want to encourage this kind of behaviour.

I would really like it if there were no more drugs and no more drug addicts in society. I think that all my NDP colleagues dream about this at night, but it is not the real situation.

Right now, drugs are being distributed to younger and younger people in schools and other places. People get into drug use. Social problems can lead people to use hard drugs, and then they become addicted.

The reality is that unfortunately people become addicts. At the end of the day, we want to help them recover from their addiction.

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This bill presupposes that we do not want people to use drugs. We do not want to see this, so they will go and hide in the streets or back alleys. This is not how addiction problems should be dealt with. Whether we like it or not, if these people do not feel accepted by the wider community or welcomed into a safe environment, they will not want to recover from their problems.

We want this program to work. InSite is the only supervised injection site in North America. However, in Quebec there is a service called Cactus Montréal. As I am a north shore MP, it is perhaps more relevant to our local situation, but I can tell you that the people at Cactus Montréal are watching InSite and all the progress it is making. They say it is a great project and that ultimately they would like to do the same thing.

InSite is the sole progressive example of a community that got organized and found an innovative solution to this problem. However, the government is setting up roadblocks, with requirements that are completely ridiculous to make sure that they cannot even operate. This flies in the face of the Supreme Court ruling that said it was legal and that InSite should continue its operations. The court added that these facilities are completely legal under section 7 of the charter.

I want to go back over a few statistics, because I think they are interesting. I have already said that the people who go to InSite at least once a week are 1.7 times more likely to enter a recovery program. In addition, 80% of the people questioned who live or work in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside support InSite. In spite of the "not in my backyard" syndrome, people who live in that area support the project.

I have been to Vancouver a number of times. I was even accompanied by the member for Vancouver East when I went to look at the real situation there. I can tell you that InSite works. The people support it and are happy to have this innovative service that takes in people who all too often are marginalized by society.

I am urging the Conservative members to reconsider this attack on InSite and other care services, which may perhaps be outside the norm, but which are innovative and really help people who are unfortunately addicted to drugs or have other drug problems.

● (1555)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I served as a trustee on the Waterloo county board of education for a number of years. As chair of the board, I visited many schools. I am a father of three and a grandfather of nine children.

I have a question for my colleague. Does she not think it is reasonable for a school community or the parents in that community to have a say as to whether one of these injection sites is brought into their neighbourhood? I cannot understand why they would not, at the very least. This bill would give members of the community a say as to where these sites would be built.

I would like my colleague to tell us whether as a mother, grandmother, or aunt she would want one of these facilities in her backyard.

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I already answered that question, but perhaps the hon. member did not hear me. If he had heard me, he would not be asking the question.

I hear "not in my backyard". However, 80% of the respondents living or working in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where InSite is located, are in favour of that facility and support it. Therefore, this site enjoys widespread support.

I do not have the honour of being a mother, but I have two young nieces. Should they ever fall into the trap of addiction, I would want them to have access to support services and be accepted by the community, so that they would not feel isolated and end up on the streets or dying from an overdose.

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is somewhat related to the question the member opposite just asked.

Would my dear colleague rather not know whether her children can walk around and play in parks because there are needles? With a facility like InSite, needles would all be in the same location, and not in parks.

● (1600)

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to share an interesting statistic directly related to Cactus Montréal. This is a needle exchange service, and the people who run it hope some day to provide the same service as InSite, because they know it works.

In 2000, Cactus Montréal distributed and collected 400,000 needles on the streets. That is a huge number. Just think of the individuals who would reuse these needles and risk contracting a disease such as HIV or AIDS. Imagine a huge pile of 400,000 needles. That is the kind of work they do.

Cactus Montréal is a different organization, but its needle exchange service is clearly essential, not only for the health of individuals who, unfortunately, have an addiction, but also for the health of children who can find needles on the streets. This initiative protects them all.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill C-2, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. I am not pleased with the act, but I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak against it, because the act does serious damage to the notion of what government ought to be doing to help some of the most vulnerable people in our country, those who are seriously at risk of dying because of an addiction to a particular drug.

Maybe Conservatives do not have any sympathy for addicts, except for Mr. Ford, in Ontario. I do not know, but they certainly seem to be willing to put at very serious risk of death and further harm people who, by their circumstances, end up being addicted to drugs and could make use of a place such as InSite in Vancouver. They tried to shut it down, and they were told by the Supreme Court of Canada that they could not do it, so they are trying an end run around safe injection sites with this legislation.

Let us look at some raw numbers and the reason this safe injection site was established in the first place. There was a situation in the lower east side of Vancouver in the mid-1990s, when about 200 people a year were dying from drug overdoses. That is a serious public health issue. It is a serious crisis in public safety. There were all sorts of other harms associated with all that activity.

InSite was established to provide a safe place where those who were addicted could inject. It was supervised by professionals who were not only providing a safe place but were also providing other services, such as referrals and access to medical services, counselling, and programs that would lead to detoxification and overcoming their addictions.

In fact, users of this site were nearly two times as likely to go to a detox centre and go on drug programs than those who may have gone there occasionally. It was not the idea to allow the addiction to continue. It was an opportunity to get them out of addiction. As a result, twice the rate of participation in detoxification programs to get off drugs took place.

When InSite started to operate, the number of fatalities from drug overdoses in the lower east side in Vancouver went down by 35%. We are talking about 70 individuals a year whose lives were saved as a result of this. Those are a lot of human lives that one particular program was able to save by being in existence. What was the government's response? It was to get rid of harm reduction as a principle of drug treatment and to shut down InSite. It is trying an end run around the Supreme Court with this particular action.

Another statistic reported in a leading medical journal deals with the fact that there were 273 overdoses in a one-year period at InSite, but not one fatality, not one. That is indicative of the fact that the supervision of the safe injection site leads to greater safety and a lack of deaths. That is how it happens. When we add up some of these facts and the startling number of 70 lives a year saved, what is the possible excuse or reason the government has for introducing this legislation?

One thing we hear about often, even from the current government and lots of others, is something called evidence-based decision-making. We have heard that before: evidence-based decision-making. A good, sensible, reasonable government should be making decisions based on evidence.

• (1605)

What do we have here? We have more than 30 peer-reviewed studies published in some of the leading medical journals in the world. Members will have heard of them. They include the *New England Journal of Medicine*, one of the pre-eminent medical journals in the world; *The Lancet*, another significant British medical journal, which publishes only serious peer-reviewed, high-standard, high-quality studies; and the *British Medical Journal*.

More than 30 peer-reviewed studies have described the beneficial impacts of InSite, just this one particular operation. Some people and many studies have looked for the negative impact, but none have come up with any evidence demonstrating harm to the community.

We have a situation where the evidence is on the side of the use of places like InSite to facilitate harm reduction, the saving of lives,

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detoxification, helping addicts to get off drugs and making communities safer.

Those are the facts. That is the evidence that is brought to this. There is support from organizations like the Canadian Medical Association. It is hardly interested in promoting the use of drugs. It is hardly interested in having activities that are bad for patients and individuals. It sees it as a positive thing, and it has criticized the government for bringing forward Bill C-2.

Who else? The Canadian Nurses Association said:

Evidence demonstrates that supervised injection sites and other harm reduction programs bring critical health and social services to vulnerable populations—especially those experiencing poverty, mental illness and homelessness.

Here is the kicker. They said:

A government truly committed to public health and safety would work to enhance access to prevention and treatment services—instead of building more barriers.

That is what we have here, a building of more barriers to helping people who are addicted to drugs.

My community of St. John's East has its share of serious drug problems. They have escalated to the point now where we have hold-ups of convenience stores and gas stations taking place. There are houses being broken in to get money to buy drugs. Some of these drugs are actually prescription drugs. There's OxyContin, a major, significant, addictive prescription drug.

How did that become the bane of so many people's existence? It is something that was supposed to be reserved for only the most serious of pain in the rarest of circumstances. I do not want to exaggerate, but I have heard people say that it is being prescribed for anything from wisdom teeth being extracted to very low levels of pain, as commonly as any other painkiller, instead of being reserved for that particular rare occasion when someone was in such serious pain that addiction was not an issue, perhaps because they were in palliative care or were about to die.

In the time I have left, I do want to say that we have serious problems. There can be solutions. The government should be working very hard to find solutions. Instead, what we see is government acting against the medical profession's advice, that of the Canadian Nurses Association, the Canadian Medical Association and all sorts of significant scientific studies that have demonstrated the value of sites such as InSite in Vancouver. We see it taking action to make it nearly impossible for anyone to open further injection sites and perhaps making another attack to try to shut down InSite once again when it gets the opportunity to do so.

As I said at the beginning, I am glad I have had the chance to speak on this bill because I do oppose it. We are against this approach. We think this is a seriously harmful bill that will cause death to individuals who are vulnerable in our society because of their addictions, not allowing them to even get near the help they need. They will stay away. Obviously they will not be able to be near that.

If people are worried about heroin addicts in their backyards, they are going to find addicts a lot closer to their backyards if they do not have a site like InSite that can actually help deliver harm reduction and vital medical and other health services to these individuals.

Government Orders

• (1610)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind Canadians that this bill is essentially about two things. It is about scientific evidence, and it is about community input. This bill requires organizations to submit evidence demonstrating why they feel an injection site is warranted.

My colleague used the term “end run” early in his comments today. I would like to ask him why he would do an end run around school communities that would like to have a say as to whether or not one of these sites is opened in their community. Why would the member do an end run around parents who might like to have a say in that?

I would ask him why he is opposed to letting communities, schools, or parent organizations have a say in whether or not one of these sites is opened in their community.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid the member misses the point. Communities already have a say. They have a say about any new service that is being put in a location in a community or neighbourhood. City councils do that all the time. They hold public meetings, listen to their citizens, and understand what the effects are. We hear about this all the time in the news.

This is not about that. This is about making it nearly impossible to have a safe injection site by putting stringent barriers to it. The Canadian Medical Association and all these scientific journals support the effectiveness of this measure in saving lives. That is what is important here.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent speech. In his remarks he mentioned that there are people with a lot of Nimbyism, saying, “Not in my backyard; I don't want a heroin addict in my backyard”.

We know the fundraising article was posted by the government on the www.conservative.ca website. It asks us to help “Keep heroin out of our backyards”. Therefore, we see Nimbyism on the www.conservative.ca website on behalf of the government.

I ask my hon. colleague to help me understand how it is that the government proposes to do that when it is creating more of a situation for people who suffer from addictions, so that they do not have a place to safely have treatments, needle exchanges or whatever types of services they might need. How is it that the Conservative fundraising machine and the Conservative government plans on keeping heroin out of our backyards by creating a situation where it is much more difficult to keep heroin addicts out of our backyards?

• (1615)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, the member raises the point that this is part of the government's scare tactic fundraising activities. The day it introduced this bill, it started a major fundraising campaign for the Conservative Party. Therefore, I think the bill is really about pushing an ideological point of view and raising money for the Conservative Party.

The member for Kitchener—Conestoga talked about having a safe injection site next to a school. I do not know what community he lives in. I presume he lives in Kitchener. Do members think the City of Kitchener would allow a safe injection site to be set up next

to the school and invite all of the addicts from anywhere around to use it? I do not think the people of Kitchener would put up with that. As the law is right now, I do not think they would have to put up with it.

Therefore, to raise these points and put in a piece of legislation like this, along with a lot of other matters that sensible people have accepted, would make it nearly impossible for anyone to cross all the barriers that are set up here to having a safe injection safe. That is the end run around the Supreme Court of Canada, which said it had to give permission because this is a life-saving activity.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today in connection with Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which I oppose. We will definitely be proposing amendments. Prior to prorogation, the government had introduced Bill C-65, which has now become Bill C-2.

In my speech, I would like to explain how we got to where we are, and why we are examining this bill. The intent of the bill, which is largely hidden because the Conservatives have been actively fundraising since introducing it, is to put a stop to supervised injection sites like InSite. At the moment, the only such site is InSite, in Vancouver. In this bill, the government has introduced an interminable list of criteria to deter people from applying for an exemption.

I am going to put this in context. With the support of the community, scientists and experts decided to set up a supervised injection site. The term “supervised” is very important here. The government decided to challenge the site and intervened, taking the issue to court. InSite won and the government lost. The case went to the appeal court, and then all the way to the Supreme Court in 2011. The Supreme Court ruling is called *Canada v. PHS Community Services Society*. I strongly encourage my colleagues to read this important ruling, because it explains the state of the law. It is a matter of fundamental rights and the charter.

This government is known for being extremely good at introducing bills and taking action that is contrary to the charter. The government says that it is concerned about the taxpayers' money, and yet it continually pushes cases all the way to the Supreme Court. This costs the taxpayers and the stakeholders a great deal of money. If I have time later, I would like to explore the legal aspects. For the time being, I will focus on the public safety aspect and in particular on public health.

The government acts without paying attention to scientific research or the opinions of experts who have commented on the matter. We in the official opposition are beginning to get used to seeing the government introduce scientifically groundless ideological bills. When the government acts, it is only to be expected that it will exaggerate and oversimplify without really addressing all the important points or taking scientific considerations, or the experts, into account. The purpose of all this is simply to raise funds. This is clearly what it is doing at the moment.

Government Orders

Back to public health. Why is it important to consider that aspect? Of course we want heroin addicts to stop using drugs. There has already been preventive work and education around that. From the community standpoint, it is very important. Sometimes, no matter what we do, we cannot help these people. A centre like InSite provides a supervised environment where doctors and experts can ensure that people are not injecting drugs in the street.

• (1620)

In terms of public health, there are tangible results. Studies indicate a decrease of 35% in overdose-related deaths. If the government cared and if it sought the well-being of the public, it would take these figures to heart. Unfortunately, the Conservatives do not do so. They do not look at this aspect, and they oversimplify the problem.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I have had an opportunity to see that the Conservatives always adopt the same ideological approach. They imply that we are with them or against them, and if we are against them, they call us every name in the book. We are in the same situation here.

When we talk about public health, we have to look to the research. And there is research. Canada is not the only country to have studied this issue. Thirty studies have been reviewed by experts, and there are 70 supervised injection sites in Europe and Australia. Studies have also been published in such highly respected international journals as the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*. Actual studies have been carried out on this, and they clearly support the position taken by the NDP, which is that of the InSite people and British Columbia.

We should not forget that all of this has received community support. I am anticipating the question my colleague asks every time. There is support from the community and the authorities in the health care field on this issue. We should therefore pay careful attention.

This is not a free-for-all place to shoot up. In this facility, there is supervision and follow-up, and children are not allowed. The result is that people do not do it in the streets. We must stop burying our heads in the sand. Saying that we do not want this in our backyard will not stop people from doing it. People will continue to do it, and that is a problem. Naturally, there are efforts in the area of education and prevention. In this case, however, we have to rely on facts, and in this respect, the government is turning a blind eye.

Let us talk about public safety. If people do not have access to supervised sites like InSite to inject themselves with drugs, they will do it in the streets, in the parks and in all the other places where it can cause problems. We could have needles lying around, cases that are not monitored, people dying and people doing it in an unsafe manner, reusing needles from other users. This will lead to an increase in blood-borne diseases, and will have a direct impact on the health of those concerned.

The Conservatives tend to say that if we are against them, we will automatically say anything. I would nevertheless like to say that the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Nurses Association and many other organizations support the NDP's position on protecting the health and safety of these people.

In closing, I would like the government to support the amendments the NDP will be proposing, but above all to realize that it has to stop acting ideologically and must finally begin to take the facts and the science into consideration.

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in part of the member's speech he said there is a very high threshold that may potentially not even be attainable. However, the reality of the situation is that what we are asking for is that communities be consulted to ensure that if an injection site is going to be placed in their community they are good with it. That is what this is about. This is not mandating that we are not going to do it.

With regard to injection sites, I have not heard once from the opposition that the one and only injection site in Canada discourages the use of heroin. In fact, it is the other way around. They just want to make sure that if someone overdoses while injecting, there is someone there to hopefully save them.

I guess I get back to my original question. Do they believe that heroin should be dispensed from the injection sites to ensure safe injection to the person who is using?

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I feel that the hon. member opposite did not listen to my speech. I said clearly that we are talking about detoxification. Programs exist and we hope that they will succeed in getting people to stop using illegal drugs.

In this case, things have gone too far. The people have tried to get help, but it did not work. We want to find a solution. The preferred solution has been studied around the world and is supported by experts in the field. I know the member wants to make everyone afraid by saying sites like that are going to be established.

As the hon. member mentioned, only one site of this kind presently exists in Canada; it is located in Vancouver.

I remind the hon. member that, according to a study done by Boyd et al. in 2008, 80% of the people surveyed, those living or working in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, supported InSite, so there is community action. Clearly, if the City of Vancouver or the provincial government were opposed to it, the site would not exist.

Some people seem to be unaware of what is really going on. They seem to be blind to what we actually have. We really must study what is already in place. Once again, unfortunately, this is an ideological approach on the part of the Conservatives.

• (1630)

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie for his very well-chosen remarks.

He has visited my riding. He is very well-prepared, as always, in standing up for his fellow citizens in such an excellent way.

Government Orders

In addition to the very high level of social acceptance that the InSite safe injection site enjoys, there is also OnSite, located above InSite, where users can get detoxification and rehabilitation services. What are the additional advantages of the site? Personally, all I see are advantages.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his compliments. He paid me so many that they cannot all be deserved.

InSite has many advantages. As I have already mentioned, some of the advantages have to do with health and safety. This is about saving lives. This is about something that works. Studies show that 35% of the lives have been saved.

I find it very difficult to listen to the Conservatives pushing their ideological agenda. On this side of the House, we look at facts. Experience in the field shows that this saves lives. All opposition members are against the Conservative government's position.

[*English*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I admit to a certain amount of soul-searching before writing my speech on the bill. It caused me to meditate quite a bit about what the role of a parliamentarian really is and the role of lawmakers in general. I am going to start there before going on to the bill itself.

What is our role here? The bill brings up this fundamental question. What are we called to be as parliamentarians? The answer is many things. First and foremost is the voice of our constituents, but we are also asked to use our conscience as any other citizen must do in his or her daily life. It is truly a great privilege to be an elected official, but there are pitfalls to this privilege. It can bring much arrogance, egotism and hubris, and we must keep at the forefront of our minds what we have no right to claim as our own power. No, this privilege does not bring with it any right to judge our fellow human beings. We are in no way morally superior because we have attained high office. We are as everyone, *ecce homo*, only human; dignified, yes, fundamentally good, filled with light and hope but not perfect. Yes, we are not perfect, but perfectible.

We must evacuate all sense of moral superiority and arrogance from our role as legislators. Most of all, we must be careful not to usurp the powers that belong not to us but to the one who made us. We must be careful when we choose to look upon our fellow human beings and judge them and see them as something other than us, something to be reviled or to be stigmatized. This is not the way of compassion as I have come to understand it.

Addiction is a terrible affliction. As a non-addict, I cannot imagine the struggle it represents every day to need a substance so much to be happy and to alleviate my suffering that I will do almost anything to get it. There is a malaise to our modernity. Our industrial society and its competitive ethos weighs heavily on the human spirit. Many people are unhappy and materialism has kept a lot of us from what is most noble and great in human beings. In this disjointed, mechanized, crass and sometimes violent and abusive culture we live in, how can we blame those most alienated and marginalized from it for suffering?

I believe that a response to this malaise and its many sicknesses must be compassion. We must offer to addicts, like any other human being, a way to be healed from what afflicts them. The question of

supporting the bill does not lie in the personal views of the morality of injection sites, but in the evidence of their efficacy as a cure. Do they protect a fellow human being from the ravages of his or her disease? Do they increase his or her chances to be cured? These, in my opinion, are the fundamental and compassionate questions we should be asking.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

The facts are clear. For example, people who made use of services at InSite—a supervised injection site in Vancouver—at least once a week were 1.7 times more likely to enrol in a permanent detox program. Evidence also shows that supervised injection sites effectively reduce the risk of contracting and spreading blood-borne diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis C. Evidence has also shown that these sites do not negatively affect public safety and that, in certain cases, they even promote it by reducing the injection of drugs in public, the violence associated with such behaviour, and drug-related waste. Furthermore, safe injection sites make it possible to strike the appropriate balance between public health and public safety. They also connect people in urgent need of health care with the services they need, such as primary health care and drug treatment services.

My colleagues do not have to take my word for it. These facts have been confirmed by health care professionals across the country. For example, the Canadian Medical Association said:

Supervised injection programs are an important harm reduction strategy. Harm reduction is a central pillar in a comprehensive public health approach to disease prevention and health promotion.

The Canadian Nurses Association stated:

Evidence demonstrates that supervised injection sites and other harm reduction programs bring critical health and social services to vulnerable populations—especially those experiencing poverty, mental illness and homelessness. A government truly committed to public health and safety would work to enhance access to prevention and treatment services—instead of building more barriers.

The facts are clear: these centres have a positive impact on addicts and on our society. For example, the rate of overdose deaths in Vancouver East has fallen by 35% since InSite was opened. A study conducted over a one-year period shows that there were 273 overdoses at InSite but none of them were fatal. In one year, 2,171 users of InSite were referred to addiction counselling or other support services.

Injection drug users who are clients of InSite are 70% less likely to share needles. Reduction of needle sharing has been cited as a best practice at the international level for reducing rates of HIV and AIDS. Users of InSite are more likely to seek medical care through the site.

Government Orders

However, the Conservatives are remaining obstinate: they intend to be the judges of these people who are suffering enormously because of their addiction. Essentially, Bill C-2 is part and parcel of a broader Conservative initiative to bring all government policies and programs in line with their anti-drug and anti-addiction ideals. They are slowly eliminating every means whereby Canadians can access injection sites. The effect of the Conservatives' agenda is to reverse the progress made in public health and the community benefits attributable to harm reduction programs over the last 20 years.

There is no denying that the Conservatives have been trying for years to close supervised injection sites. They have spent tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars on court proceedings to get them shut down. They are even prepared to defy the Supreme Court ruling, undermine the court's decision and find some other way to close down supervised injection sites, which do not square with Conservative ideology. Why are they so bent on refusing to heal people who are sick? Why not choose compassion instead of judgment?

If this remedy did not work and had no benefits, I might understand the position of the Conservative government, but that is not the case. It seems to me that it is our duty to rid ourselves of our prejudices, show compassion to addicts and create conditions that will help them overcome their difficult situation.

• (1640)

[English]

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been here for a couple of days of this debate and I have had the same question for the New Democrat speakers. I have asked it repeatedly and have yet to get it answered.

I understand they object to large chunks of the bill, but the bill has specific criteria laying out when and when not communities should be consulted. As well, there are criteria for the minister to make a judgment call about whether or not to allow an injection site. I am sure the hon. members do not object to every element of those criteria, but since they object to the bill, I gather they object to some of the criteria put in there.

Specifically, which criteria in the bill do you agree should be part of judging whether or not a site should be approved and which criteria do you think the minister has been wrong to include in the legislation?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the member, I would just remind all hon. members to direct their questions and comments to the Chair. I presume it is the member for Pontiac who he would like to hear the response from, not the Chair.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, when we are talking about public procurement, one of the major ways that we can try to modify the access to a particular program is designing the criteria so that, really, only one company could actually have a successful contract bid.

What is going on in this case, and it is quite clear as a strategy and all the professionals know it, is that the Conservative government is trying to create so many criteria that it is basically going to become impossible to have a safe injection site. I do not think that is the

response that we need when we are dealing with people who are fundamentally ill and need the care of an injection site.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the speech by the hon. member for Pontiac. Like others before him, he talked about the environment these people need to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into our society. We marginalize these people, who are left to fend for themselves, and that is causing great havoc in our societies today. They need supervised environments to be rehabilitated. In fact, that is their first contact with society. They need a structured society, something that will give them hope. That is often their last chance.

Could my colleague elaborate on that aspect?

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, they are our society's exiled and marginalized. The worst thing we can do is push them even further away. Having access to a safe injection site brings them back to society. It shows them that there is a place for them and that professionals believe in their future. I cannot speak for them because I am not in their situation, but these people would surely like to be treated like human beings and to be loved. They would like to be able to heal, to have hope and to know that our culture is not abandoning them.

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague asked the hon. member a good question.

Without any kind of answer, we have to assume that they are fine that there is absolutely no framework in place at all to limit people who are going to go out and actually do two crimes before they even get to one of these safe injection sites. They have to buy illicit drugs, they have to be in possession of illicit drugs and they have to go to one of these sites. Even after they are supervised or released from this site, they are hopped up on drugs, going back into the communities.

Is there any kind of protection that he would like to have for communities at all, in order to ensure that they are safe?

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, there is an assumption in that question that the police do not do their jobs. The police keep the vast majority of our communities extremely safe. The other thing the member does not understand is addiction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 45 (7), I request that the vote be deferred to the end of government orders on Tuesday, November 26, 2013.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SAFEGUARDING CANADA'S SEAS AND SKIES ACT

The House resumed from November 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to debate Bill C-3, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, which was previously Bill C-57.

First, I would like to give a few statistics to support my argument. Clearly, this bill has a number of objectives, in particular that of improving safety when oil is shipped by water. That is an objective that interests us on this side of the House.

I think that this issue is particularly relevant and urgent given that tanker traffic tripled in Canada between 2005 and 2010, particularly on the west coast. The issue is extremely relevant since that traffic is expected to increase by 300% by 2016, and with all the pipeline expansion projects now on the table, the delivery of crude oil will increase from 300,000 to 700,000 barrels a day.

The bill makes only relatively minor amendments and improvements, but given how urgent and important this situation is, we will support the bill at second reading. There is no guarantee, however, that we will support it at third reading. The essential work will be done in committee.

One of the reasons why we are supporting the bill is this. Despite the figures I just mentioned, the government has reduced the funding for or eliminated a number of organizations that play a vital role in monitoring and quickly responding to oil spills or other marine disasters of this sort. For example, the government has cut funding for various marine communications and traffic services centres and for environmental emergency response centres.

The bill amends five laws. I think that we can all agree on the amendments. The first part of the bill, which amends the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, provides for the compensation of airlines for loss, damage or liability caused by war risks.

Part 2 amends the Aeronautics Act to provide certain persons with powers to investigate aviation accidents or incidents, whether civilian or military. This will have to be clarified to determine the role of the armed forces, for example. Will they investigate an air disaster or catastrophe, an accident or incident, if it involves both civilian and military aircraft? The involvement of the armed forces in an investigation of such an incident will have to be closely examined in relation to the responsibility of the Transportation Safety Board.

Part 3 amends the Canada Marine Act. It amends the effective day of the appointment of a director of a port authority. This is a relatively minor amendment because the purpose of this part of the act is simply to amend the effective day based on the date of notice from a municipality or a government.

Parts 4 and 5 are much more important in terms of scope and consequences.

Part 4 amends the Marine Liability Act to implement the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea, 2010. The convention itself provides that the owner of a ship shall be liable for the costs and expenses incurred by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, by a response organization, or by any other person, in Canada or in a state that is a party to the convention, in respect of measures taken to prevent, repair, remedy or minimize damage caused by hazardous and noxious substances.

This is an absolutely fundamental issue, particularly having regard to the funding cuts, cutbacks and reductions that have been imposed by the Conservative government. We are talking about organizations based on both the west and east coasts.

● (1650)

One of these organizations that is directly affected is in the riding that I represent, Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. This centre has been directly affected by the proposed closure of the search and rescue centre based in Quebec City, whose function, as its name indicates, is to carry out marine search and rescue operations, particularly in the St. Lawrence River up to the gulf and estuary. This centre remains open, but we cannot say that is thanks to the Conservative government. In fact, in order to save \$1 million, according to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the government wanted to close this centre which serves a vital function. It was opened in the 1970s as a direct response to criticism from the Commissioner of Official Languages. The needs of the communities on the northern and southern shores of the St. Lawrence, as well as of francophone users of the river, were not being met. I should point out that the government wanted to eliminate this centre and transfer its operations to Halifax and Trenton.

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In a very recent report, the Commissioner of Official Languages found that closing this centre would result in the reduction and virtual elimination of appropriate search and rescue services in French. This has also been confirmed by the Canadian Coast Guard. It has been clearly demonstrated that the Halifax and Trenton centres are not equipped to provide these services. Not only is there the language issue, but there is also another extremely important issue: knowledge of the banks. This issue particularly affects the Quebec City centre, the Newfoundland and Labrador centre, and the west coast centres.

I would like the government to examine its conscience with regard to the bill we are now discussing, and also with regard to its responsibilities and actions in the area of marine transport safety.

Part 4 deals with the liability of ship owners who could be held liable for spills of oil or other hazardous substances. Another factor will be extremely critical, given the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic we witnessed not so long ago. In the case of rail transportation, the liability rests with the owner of the railway and the trains. In the recent Lac-Mégantic case, the insurance seems to be clearly inadequate in relation to the damage caused.

These recent cases involving rail transportation should serve as an example to us in marine transportation. I fervently hope that the transport committee or the appropriate committee will study this matter very seriously.

Finally, part 5 amends the Canada Shipping Act, 2001. Actually, it requires companies to notify the minister of their operations and to submit plans to the minister in order for operations to be conducted. Once again, the matter is one of prevention. The points we are discussing here are extremely complex. I want to make sure that the committee studying this bill does so diligently in order that safety and prevention needs are met.

We in the NDP have done our job. We have proposed various measures to expand the mandate of the bill and the scope of the amendments proposed by the government. We want to make sure that the bill on which we will be asked to vote will fully and completely protect the environment in which this shipping will occur. We must protect the coastal communities that lie close to the areas where ships already sail and where even more ships transporting hazardous materials, such as oil, will be sailing. Oil tanker traffic is going to increase considerably in the coming years, and the government must do its job and take this matter seriously.

I invite the government to give this extremely complex bill serious study and, in due course, to include in it the items that we have proposed so that it properly meets the country's future needs.

● (1655)

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we feel that this bill is a step in the right direction. As my colleague pointed out, we will support the bill at second reading so that it can be sent to committee and panels of experts can address some of our concerns.

For example, the federal Commissioner of the Environment's recommendations on the mandate of the Canadian Coast Guard, which is to respond to oil spills from offshore platforms, is not covered under Bill C-3. This is one of the instances where we find

that the bill does not go far enough. The bill contains some good measures, but we would like to see more.

I would like my colleague to expand on this point, because it is one of our concerns. People throughout the Atlantic region want to feel safe. The federal Commissioner of the Environment has expressed his concerns about this. I would like my colleague to talk about the improvements that could be made to this bill.

● (1700)

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely relevant issue. Indeed, the report of the Commissioner of the Environment is and will be extremely useful to the work of the committees. There are changes we would like to make to this bill. We do not want to take anything away from the bill; we just want to add to it, to make it more comprehensive.

These are part of the measures that have been proposed and that directly concern the government's actions. For example, the government could cancel the closure of the B.C. regional office for oil spill emergencies. This closure makes no sense if we really want to tackle the issue of marine safety for shipments of hazardous materials.

We would also like the government to take this opportunity to cancel the cuts to the main environmental emergency programs, including in the event of an oil spill in Newfoundland and Labrador and in British Columbia. In addition, we want the government to strengthen the capacity—which is currently non-existent—of petroleum boards to deal with oil spills, as recommended by the Commissioner of the Environment.

We are actually supporting a wider scope for this bill, and we hope the government will listen.

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to speak to Bill C-3, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

I will start with some background. This is the former Bill C-57. Unfortunately, it died on the order paper when the government made the wonderful decision to prorogue Parliament. When the bill was introduced, the official opposition's natural resources critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, wrote to the Minister of Transport. I would like to begin by reading some excerpts from his letter.

Government Orders

I should say that I have been an MP for just over 30 months now and I sometimes feel disillusioned because I feel that the opposition and the governing party are really not listening to each other. We have come up with good solutions. We are ready to give credit to the government where credit is due, but in our democracy, a majority government could not care less about what we say. That is why I think it is important to mention that my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster went to the trouble of writing to the minister on April 5, 2013. He prefaced his letter by stating that he was writing on behalf of the official opposition.

In the second paragraph of his letter, my colleague pointed out that Bill C-57 had a few good things going for it. He added that the piloting experience required and increased oversight were a step in the right direction, but he noted that there was still a long way to go to make up for the draconian cuts that had been made to oil tanker safety in the previous federal budget.

He started by saying that we supported the bill in principle. In fact, we asked the government to send the bill to committee before second reading in order to address some of our concerns.

For example, my colleague wrote in his letter that, under Bill C-57, authorities would report directly to the Minister of Transport in the event of an accident. The bill also limits liability. That said, accident prevention is barely mentioned. He said that he was certain that the minister understood why British Columbia residents were not satisfied with a simple response plan in the event of an oil spill off the west coast. This is not a trivial matter. They want to ensure that action will be taken.

He closed his letter by saying that we hoped the Conservative government would choose to cancel its decision to cut safety measures and that it would broaden the scope of Bill C-57.

We actually said that Bill C-57 was a good bill, but that we wanted to broaden its scope a bit. In response, we received a self-congratulatory three-page letter from the Minister of Transport.

• (1705)

[*English*]

It said thanks for taking the time to write to me on Bill C-57, the safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act. I am glad that you recognize the positive aspects of this legislation. Blah, blah, blah.

[*Translation*]

In those three pages, the government boasted about being good for Canadians. It is rather incredible.

As the official opposition, the NDP did attempt to kickstart the dialogue that unfortunately has broken down in Ottawa. The NDP wanted to work with the government to do more, to better serve Canadians and to better respond to the concerns of people living in coastal areas. Unfortunately, the government was not the slightest bit interested in our proposals. It told us that it did not have to do what we wanted.

I would like to say that in the three-page letter written by the then minister of transport, he never mentioned that our proposals had some potential. He did not apologize for not allowing us to study it

in committee; he did not even acknowledge that that was the purpose of the letter. It was so arrogant on his part. It is unfortunate.

Now the bill has returned under another name: Bill C-3. As my colleague mentioned, this bill will amend five acts.

Part 1 enacts the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, which authorizes the Minister of Transport to undertake to indemnify certain airlines for loss, damage or liability caused by events that are commonly referred to in the insurance industry as war risks.

This creates a system under which the government covers the costs of damage in the event of unlawful attacks such as rebellion, hijacking or armed conflict. It is about keeping important air services in operation in Canada in the event of a crisis.

We are seeking clarification on some small points. The government is so afraid of what it is proposing that it is not ready to go to committee to answer our questions. I find that annoying.

Part 2 amends the Aeronautics Act to provide certain persons with powers to investigate aviation accidents or incidents involving civilians and aircraft or aeronautical installations operated by or on behalf of the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Forces or a visiting force.

We want in-depth consultation on this part with expert witnesses, in particular in terms of the discretionary powers of ministers.

As hon. members are aware, Conservative ministers have been giving themselves a lot of discretionary powers for the past two and a half years. We would like to have a little more information about this.

We would also like to go deeper into the matter of public disclosure of the results of investigations. We are all in favour of transparency.

Part 3 amends the Canada Marine Act in relation to the effective day of the appointment of a director of a port authority. There is no problem with that.

Part 4 amends the Marine Liability Act to implement the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea, 2010.

I will quote what that 2010 international convention added:

The Convention covers the following damage resulting from the carriage of [hazardous and noxious substances] by sea: loss of life or personal injury on board or outside the ship carrying HNS; loss of, or damage to, property outside the ship; loss or damage caused by contamination of the environment; and costs of preventive measures taken by any person after an incident has occurred to prevent or mitigate damage.

Part 5 amends the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, to introduce new requirements for the operators of oil handling facilities.

On the whole, this is good, including the requirement to notify the minister of their operations and to submit plans to the minister. I live in hope that the minister will notify Canadians as soon as he is notified.

Government Orders

Part 5 introduces a few points, including a new requirement whereby the operators of oil handling facilities must submit to the minister a response plan, civil and criminal liability for response organizations engaged in response operations, the application of new measures and monetary sanctions, with new investigative powers for Transport Canada investigators.

I see I am almost out of time. Those are the five pieces of legislation that will be affected by this bill. As I said, that is not bad. Overall, I agree with the bill. I would have liked it to go a little further. This is a common problem with our Conservative friends. Basically, I would have liked it to go to committee, but we will have to wait for third reading.

We will be voting in favour of this bill at second reading. That does not mean we will be supporting it at third reading. We will wait and see what the experts have to say.

I wanted to talk a little bit about what this will involve, but I will go directly to what we want to see in this bill.

We came up with about 10 ideas of what we want to be included. Among them, we would like the cancellation of plans to reduce Coast Guard services and close stations, including the Coast Guard station in Kitsilano. We would also like the cancellation of cuts to marine communications and traffic services, including the maritime traffic control communications terminals in Vancouver and St. John's.

• (1710)

The government must cancel the closure of the British Columbia regional office.

I will not have enough time to name all of them. We had about 10 good recommendations. I imagine my colleagues who sit on that committee could list them. It is important that we take the time to do a proper study. I would have liked to refer this to committee before second reading, but since this is where we are, I would be happy to answer questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine

The NDP tried to talk to the Department of Transport in order to make some changes and additions to the bill before it was introduced in the House to make it more comprehensive, complete and appropriate with respect to marine transportation of dangerous goods. That is what we want to talk about today.

Compensation in case of a disaster is an extremely important part of this bill. We want the owners of ships involved in disasters to be fully liable for the damage they cause. For example, Norway and Greenland have no set limits on how much damage a shipping company can be liable for. That raises two questions.

First, should Canada also ensure that shipping companies are fully and solely liable? Second, in light of the tragedy we recently experienced in Lac-Mégantic with respect to rail transport, should the government not also ensure that the law includes measures requiring shipping companies to ensure they have the means to assume the cost of cleaning up a marine disaster?

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for those two very relevant questions.

I often look to Norway and Greenland for inspiration. We do not necessarily need to follow in their footsteps, but our committee should look closely at the standards they have set. That way, we can weigh the pros and cons and determine whether we should move in the same direction. I hope that we can invite experts from those two countries to our committee or talk to them via video conference, so that we can ask them some questions.

As for his second question, concerning the transportation of dangerous goods, we unfortunately saw what happened in Lac-Mégantic. Today, the minister made an announcement, and the government is using this tragedy to score political points. It is quite appalling, but that is what we must contend with.

I get the impression that we are not concerned enough about the transportation of dangerous goods in this country, even though I know the transport committee will be studying it. Transportation of dangerous goods by land, sea or air must be taken seriously. It does not make sense that there is no law telling companies what to do.

Under this bill, oil carriers will have to submit plans to the transport minister, but is that enough?

It seems as though the price tag for Lac-Mégantic will be quite high, and the company is not even able to pay for the damage it caused. Is that normal? Must the government always pay? We are talking about saving taxpayers' money. Should that company have had the money needed to cover the costs associated with that disaster?

Those are all good questions that need to be answered in committee.

• (1715)

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member did not have time to finish talking about how to improve the bill.

The NDP will support this bill because it is a step in the right direction, but we regret that the government has refused to expand the scope of the bill at the request of the NDP.

Can the hon. member tell us more about what the NDP is demanding with regard to the changes it would like to make to this bill to ensure that Canadians feel safer?

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

It is true that I did not have time to mention all our recommendations and I hardly talked about the environment although the purpose of the bill is to improve the environment and to protect our seas and oceans.

Government Orders

Among other things, we would require the Canadian Coast Guard to work with its American counterparts and conduct a parallel study to examine the risks resulting from additional tanker traffic in Canadian waters. We know how many tankers are in our Canadian waters, so it is absolutely crucial to use this bill before us to improve the situation. I would point out that many people and groups support our positions.

I would like to end with a short quote. Federal Commissioner of the Environment Scott Vaughan stated that, even with the Kitsilano Coast Guard resources, a Suezmax-type supertanker, carrying between one and two million barrels of crude oil, “significantly exceeds Transport Canada's spill-response thresholds”. When our Commissioner of the Environment says that, we must ask ourselves some serious questions.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to this bill, especially since transportation safety affects the residents of La Pointe-de-l'Île a great deal.

In my constituency, trains carry hazardous materials into the heart of Montreal. My constituency also has refineries and petrochemical industries. It is therefore very important for the residents of La Pointe-de-l'Île to know that they are safe and that they can count on their government to put the strictest measures and the tightest regulations in place so that disasters such as the one in Lac-Mégantic, or the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, do not happen again.

Today, during question period, two of my colleagues asked questions about a spill in Athabaska. I therefore feel that the debate we are having today is very important, so that Canadians can feel safe. Serious accidents are happening more and more frequently. People have unfortunately lost loved ones. I think it is extremely important for Canadians watching these debates on television to be able to say that they can finally count on the government and on Parliament to keep them safe in their homes.

That brings me to my second point. As I said, the NDP is going to support this bill because it is a step in the right direction. The bill contains a number of positive features, such as the requirements for piloting and for surveillance. We might also mention the increased safety of oil tankers and especially the toughening of reviews, inspections and aerial surveillance. Unfortunately, this small step in the right direction will hardly improve safety at all. It is also very weak in light of the dangers that have resulted from all the cuts that the Conservatives have announced in their budgets since their majority government came to power in 2011. Yes, it is a step in the right direction, but we are faced with years of neglect in transportation safety by sea, by rail or by road. We are dealing with years of lack of regulation, of deregulation, and of neglect. This is a political choice and I find it very regrettable that the Conservatives are using Canadians' fear as a political lever. Saving money on the backs of Canadians and at the cost of their safety is no way to govern.

As I said in my speech earlier today on supervised injection sites, we are talking about public safety. If we can save just one life, there is no reason not to adopt the strictest and most important regulations. I think it is absolutely ridiculous. We have no words for how horrible this is. It is also unfortunate to see that the Conservatives have decided to close the Quebec City search and rescue centre, which

will put many lives at risk. Because of the budget cuts to British Columbia's oil spill response centre and to the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, in British Columbia, the measures in Bill C-3 will unfortunately not keep Canadians safer.

• (1720)

For instance, the response time will be longer. If we look at the east coast, the Quebec City centre is the only bilingual centre, so francophones might not be able to receive service in French anymore when they call for help.

We support this bill, so you might wonder why my speech today points out the negative aspects. As I said, it is because this bill seeks to correct mistakes after years of neglect. However, to add insult to injury, this bill does not even include the best regulations and standards for Canadians.

For example, in my introduction, I drew a parallel with railway safety. Many derailments have unfortunately made headlines in recent years. The Lac-Mégantic tragedy is sort of the pinnacle of this neglect. Now the players are starting to wake up. The Prime Minister decides to go to Lac Mégantic and the Minister of Transport makes announcements.

Why then do the Conservatives not want to work with us to avoid this type of tragedy in the future and to avoid losing any more friends, to ensure no more Canadians are lost and no more spills harm our environment?

The Conservatives passed this bill somewhat hastily because Canadians are increasingly objecting to their projects, such as the northern gateway pipeline, for example.

The government is dismantling all environmental regulations. While the bill is a step in the right direction, it is a very minuscule step, unfortunately. It will barely address the Conservatives' neglect and the millions in cuts they have made to our safety. I previously mentioned the search and rescue centres as well as the emergency response centres.

I have risen several times today to implore my colleagues to ensure that the safety of Canadians will not be set aside and that the savings sought by the government will not be realized at the expense or to the detriment of our constituents—of Quebeckers and Canadians.

The role of government is not only to provide services, but also to ensure that people feel safe in their homes. They must feel safe when they drive their car and cross a railroad track. They also need to know that their environment and their health are safe.

The NDP has repeatedly proposed a very important principle, the polluter-pay principle. We would like the Conservatives to consider this principle and for companies and response organizations to be required to have enough insurance to clean up their mess.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

My colleague pointed out to me that the damage caused at Lac-Mégantic totaled more than \$300 million and the company had only \$25 million in insurance. Who will cover the rest, then? The government will. Canadians will.

It is important to remember that prevention is better than any bill or any action we could take. We must ensure that we are right here to debate and find a way of providing Canadians with the best standards and the best regulations so that they are safe at home. They must be able to rely on the fact that the government cares about their environment and their safety.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, part of the good work of an opposition is not only to oppose government policy and legislation where it needs to be opposed, but also to work with the government sometimes to improve legislation that may be well intentioned but could use improvement. Bill C-3 is an example where the New Democrats are prepared to offer cautious support for this bill, which does some good things, but does not go far enough in terms of protecting our coasts and public safety.

Some of the things I know New Democrats want are for the government to reverse Coast Guard closures and the scaling back of services, including the closure of the Kitsilano Coast Guard station in my province; to improve marine communication traffic service centres; and generally to improve safety on our coasts to ensure they are safe for people and traffic.

Could my hon. colleague comment on some of the positive changes that the New Democrats might want to offer to this bill so we can make it better and stronger legislation?

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much for his question. I know he has worked extremely hard with his colleagues from British Columbia to try to have the Conservatives reverse their decisions, especially those to close the Kitsilano Coast Guard station and the emergency response centres.

This bill would provide more resources, but it does not go far enough. Indeed, the NDP has tried to widen the scope of this bill, to enable the people who work on the ground and have the required expertise to move forward with their efforts to make Canadians feel safer.

We asked the Conservatives to reverse their decision to close the Coast Guard station and the search and rescue centre. This was precisely intended to give resources to the people on the ground, to make Canadians feel safer at home.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The member for La Pointe-de-l'Île will have three minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

It being 5:31 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC) moved that Bill C-483, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (escorted temporary absence), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank Kim Hancox-Spencer for all of her time, patience and help in getting this bill to this stage.

It is my honour to rise today and have an opportunity to speak to my Bill C-483 and highlight our Conservative government's strong action to support victims of crime. Our Conservative government has worked to re-establish Canada as a country where those who break the law are held accountable for their actions, where sentences match the severity of crimes and where the rights of victims come before the rights of criminals. We believe that victims must be at the heart of the criminal justice system.

Since 2006, we have provided more than \$120 million to respond to the needs of victims of crime. The Safe Streets and Communities Act, one of our first bills after forming a majority government, was a significant accomplishment, one that further strengthened support for victims. For example, the Safe Streets and Communities Act provides the Parole Board of Canada and Correctional Service Canada with additional authority to give information to victims.

The Safe Streets and Communities Act brought about meaningful changes in the lives of victims by ensuring that the concerns of victims were taken into account in parole hearings. Victims have consistently called for greater fairness and a greater voice in the criminal justice system. This imbalance between the rights of offenders and the rights of victims was also noted in a report released in 2010 by the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

Our government has listened and we continue to take action to support victims of crime. We have announced our plan to bring forward legislation to create a victims' bill of rights, one that will enshrine victims' rights in federal law—

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

The hon. member for Malpeque is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is relevance.

I thought we were here to debate the private member's bill. I have not heard one word on the private member's bill yet. All I have heard is a lot rhetoric about what the government is doing. I thought this was a private member's bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for Malpeque for his intervention. He will know, of course, that relevance is part of the standing orders as it relates to debate.

Private Members' Business

That said, the hon. member for Oxford is not even two minutes into his remarks. I am certain that he is going to bring that together, in terms of the question that is before the House.

The hon. member for Oxford.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think if the member for Malpeque would just wait for a couple of seconds, he will understand.

This commitment was recently reaffirmed in the Speech from Throne, which noted that our government will introduce a victims' bill of rights to restore victims to their rightful place at the heart of our justice system.

Indeed, these are all important steps. We are pleased with the progress we have made. We are taking the necessary steps to reshape the criminal justice system into one that is more responsive to the needs of victims. That is why I introduced the bill before us today, which would build upon the previous measures introduced by our government.

Bill C-483 proposes to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act as it relates to escorted temporary absences for offenders convicted of first- or second-degree murder. The bill is consistent with our commitment to ensuring that the needs of victims and victims' families be considered when correctional officials make decisions affecting a prisoner's release. An escorted temporary absence would allow a prisoner to leave prison for very short periods of time, for very specific reasons. As the name implies, the inmate is escorted for the duration of the absence by law enforcement, possibly a sheriff or a correctional officer.

I would like to take a few moments to briefly outline the current structure for escorted temporary absences, as set out in the Criminal Code.

With the exception of specific situations I will mention in just a moment, the Parole Board is the releasing authority on escorted temporary absences for all those serving indeterminate sentences, from the start of their sentence up until they reach day parole eligibility. For those sentenced to a minimum sentence of life imprisonment, eligibility for day parole occurs three years prior to eligibility for full parole.

The exception to this is the escorted temporary absence for medical reasons, judicial proceedings, or a coroner's inquest, which can be authorized by the Correctional Service of Canada at any time in the sentence. Once those serving an indeterminate sentence reach day parole eligibility, the Correctional Service of Canada then becomes the releasing authority for escorted temporary absences, and so remains until the time the offender is conditionally released into the community.

That is the current scheme. I would now like to take a moment to examine what Bill C-483 proposes to do.

The bill proposes to grant the Parole Board of Canada authority for the full length of the sentence to grant or cancel escorted temporary absence for offenders convicted of first or second degree murder.

The exception to this would be that the Correctional Service of Canada would retain the ability to authorize escorted temporary absences for medical emergencies. This would mean that the wardens of federal prisons would no longer have authority to grant temporary escorted absences to inmates convicted of first- or second-degree murder, except in a medical emergency.

Instead, the authority would rest with appointed Parole Board of Canada members, who are accountable for their decisions.

As I have previously noted, for some victims' families, the decision-making authority of wardens to grant escorted temporary absences to murderers has been a matter of great concern. There are several reasons for this, including the decision-making process, access to hearings, a victim's right to make a statement and access to decisions.

I will briefly touch upon each of these reasons.

When a decision regarding an escorted temporary absence is made by the Correctional Service of Canada, no hearings are conducted, as decisions are made on an administrative basis by institutional heads. In contrast, when decisions by the Parole Board of Canada are made, hearings are conducted until the first escorted temporary absence has been approved, and further hearings can be held at the Parole Board's discretion.

Given the administrative nature of decisions made by the Correctional Service of Canada regarding escorted temporary absences, victims and the public are not granted access to the decision-making process.

However, when the Parole Board of Canada conducts a hearing, a victim or a member of the public who applies in writing is permitted to attend as an observer at a hearing where their attendance would not disrupt the hearing, present security concerns, adversely affect the person providing the information to the Parole Board, or adversely affect the appropriate balance between the public interest in knowing and the offender's application.

Furthermore, under the power of the Correctional Service of Canada, not only is there no right for victims to attend the decision-making process, they also have no right to make a statement when decisions are made for an offender's escorted temporary absence. When the Parole Board of Canada conducts a hearing on an escorted temporary absence, the victim may present a statement. The victim may comment on the harm or damage that has resulted from the offence and its continuing impact, including concerns for his or her safety, and on the possible release of the offender.

● (1735)

Even if the victim does not attend, the Parole Board of Canada has the option to allow the presentation of a statement in an alternative format therefore still allowing the victim's voice to be heard.

Private Members' Business

Finally, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act does not require the Correctional Services Canada to maintain a registry of its decisions therefore limiting access to information for the victim and accountability to the public. However, the Parole Board of Canada must maintain a registry of its decisions and decisions rendered by the Parole Board under section 746(1) of the Criminal Code along with the reasons for its decisions.

An individual who demonstrates an interest in a case, may, on written application to the Parole Board, have access to the contents of the registry related to that case. This request is balanced out in order to ensure that no information is disclosed of which could reasonably be expected to jeopardize the safety of any person or reveal the source of information obtained in confidence. This allows the victim to access not only the decision on an escorted temporary absence but also the reasons for its approval or refusal.

As we can see, there are flaws in the current system that result in a non-accountable and inaccessible system and hinder the rights and voices of victims.

Through my private member's bill, I want to ensure that proper measures of transparency and access are in place for all individuals affected by temporary absences, including the victims. It is also our firm belief that the decisions of the Parole Board of Canada should be respected in letter and spirit as it is an institution that is accountable to all Canadians. I believe the bill is a step in the right direction in this regard.

As I conclude, I would reiterate our government's strong commitment to keeping our streets and communities safe and to a fair and efficient justice system that supports the rights of victims. I hope we can count on the support of the NDP and the Liberals for this common sense measure.

● (1740)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Oxford for his remarks. I will have more to say in a few minutes about it.

He puts a very large onus on the Parole Board of Canada, given that we have something near 3,000 people serving sentences for murder in our system. If all the escorted temporary absence requests have to go to the Parole Board, I wonder if he talked to the Parole Board before the preparation of the bill about whether it would have the necessary resources to accommodate the solution he has proposed, especially in view of the fact the government just cut another \$3 million from the Parole Board budget this year. It has a 20,000 person pardon backlog with which it is unable to deal.

Therefore, the member's specific solution to this problem seems to present additional problems for the Parole Board in terms of resources.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I do believe the Parole Board can handle whatever the issue is, but my friend opposite has to have some thoughts about the victims. One of the problems that this has created, and I mentioned the name of the victim who had brought this matter forward, is that the Parole Board makes its decisions in an open and transparent manner, providing accessibility to victims and their families.

In these cases, what happens is the Parole Board is taken out of the equation and it goes to the warden of the prison. I have no complaints about the warden of the prison or anything of that nature. It is the process that is wrong. The victims get no information. As a result of that, they are not allowed any input into it. Therefore, all of a sudden there is a surprise that an inmate has been granted day parole by a warden and has not gone through the parole system, which is the system that is developed to provide some access to victims.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is somewhat along the same lines as the last question and that is one of resources, both human and financial.

Could the member for Oxford tell us how much more this will cost the criminal justice system? It is a more onerous process with people involved in the Parole Board. While he is at it, because certainly we will be raising these questions at committee if it gets there, could he tell us, seeing as we are going to this new system, what are the number of offences that have occurred by these people who have been granted temporary escorted passes by wardens? Does he have any evidence to show that they have committed offences when they have been on temporary escorted passes?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, that is the whole issue. These people have no concern for the victims. This is about the victims having some rights in the system. They are worried about the criminals, about their getting out and getting out quicker.

The Parole Board system functions now with people for up to three years outside of the release date. If they have no concern about the victims, I do not know what their concern is. They have to have concerns about victims and the families.

These people do not seem to understand that this puts those folks at a terrible stage in their lives. They have already lost a loved one, then they go through it over and over again.

This is about victims. It is not about the criminals.

● (1745)

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Oxford for bringing this very important piece of legislation forward.

On this side of the House, as the member has mentioned, we want to put the rights of victims first. He is doing this with this particular bill with regard to escorted temporary absences.

In the member's opening remarks, he did mention Kim Hancox-Spencer. I am just wondering if he can comment on whether Miss Hancox-Spencer supports this legislation, and whether he has had an opportunity to speak to other victims of crime or the families of victims of crime. How are they feeling about this particular piece of legislation? Do they think this is actually going to address some of their concerns?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, Ms. Hancox-Spencer's husband was a murder victim. He was a police officer in Toronto.

Private Members' Business

I have spoken with her. She is very adamant about this whole issue. It is about being fair to victims and letting them be a part of the system. Currently they are part of the system up to a certain point and then they are cut off. That does not seem right to her, and it does not seem right to other victims with whom we have talked.

This is about victims' rights. It is not about the rights of criminals.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill C-483, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act with respect to escorted temporary absence. The bill has been brought forward by the member for Oxford, I think with very good intentions, but as is often the case, I have many reservations about these kinds of private members' bills.

My first concern is that the bill is part of a pattern we have seen in this Parliament of the introduction of bills that more properly ought to be government bills. Government bills differ from private members' bills in many ways. One of those is in how much scrutiny and how much debate they receive in the House. An even more important way they differ is in the kind of scrutiny they receive before they even arrive in the House. Therefore, as a private member's bill, Bill C-483 escapes any scrutiny with regard to its conformity with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

My concern here is not just about the protection of fundamental freedoms, although I do have that concern, but it is also about the stability and certainty we need in our legal system if we want to make sure that the rule of law can actually function. If we pass measures that are likely to be eventually overturned in the courts, or even if the outcome of this measure is endless litigation, then we add a significant challenge to our legal system. How can people know what the law is? How can even defence attorneys or prosecutors be certain that the actions they are taking will actually end up being upheld in court? Without that kind of scrutiny, when something comes forward as a private member's bill, we risk creating instability in the legal system over the long term.

My second concern is that we have had a large number of private members' bills introduced, which were actually government bills masquerading as private members' bills, and they all sought to amend the Criminal Code and/or the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, piecemeal. What we have is a number of different bills making a number of different changes to a very complex Criminal Code and a very complex Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Therefore, quite apart from the dangers of inadvertently adopting contradictory provisions as we deal with these bills, we have another problem. We have a certain danger that we will adopt changes to the Criminal Code or the Corrections and Conditional Release Act without waiting to see the results of the preceding bills that we have already adopted. We have not even seen what has happened or what is going to happen with some of the changes we have already made, and now we are changing the bills yet again. It raises a problem with rule of law. It raises a problem with knowing the certain consequences of what we are doing here in the House.

My third concern is that the ideas for these Conservative private members' bills are often ripped from sensational headlines. They are based on cases that, by their nature, outrage or concern the public and all of us. They forget that these cases, which are so outrageous

and sensational, are often news precisely because they depart from the norm, because they are outrageous and unusual.

Therefore, in attempting to fix the law based on the exceptions that are represented by these extreme cases, we do run the risk of throwing out the baby with the bath water. We may have some things that are operating, as in the case of escorted temporary absences, with a 99% success rate, so we focus on the 1%. These cases are tragic and probably could have been prevented through some other means, but we throw out the whole system, which has been working very well to help rehabilitate people and get them back into society successfully.

I acknowledge that the bill does attempt to address two real concerns. One is the sensitivity of the families of victims of murder when they see someone who has been convicted of this very serious crime released from custody, even if only on a temporary basis. That is something we are sensitive to on this side of the House. It is something we feel needs to be addressed.

The other concern that is real is the safety of escorted temporary absences, both for the public and for corrections staff. The bill, unfortunately, does not really address that concern in its provisions.

For those reasons, New Democrats will be supporting Bill C-483 at second reading. There are legitimate concerns here and we think that in committee we can find the right measures to address these concerns. What we have to do is make sure we do not confuse escorted temporary absences with parole. On the other side, there is an unfortunate tendency to use a phrase that describes escorted temporary absences as "parole by the back door". The previous minister was very fond of talking about this. Escorted temporary absences are not a form of parole. They are a way in which we test whether offenders are ready for staged and supervised reintegration into the community.

● (1750)

The way we find out whether they handle increased freedom and the way we can find out how they react to being out of custody is through escorted temporary absences when there is someone with them to observe and prevent the negative consequences that might occur. As I said, it is about the staged and supervised reintegration into society that is the real purpose of escorted temporary absences.

This leads me to something the member for Oxford did not mention, which is public safety. He talked about victims quite sincerely, and I believe that. I share that concern, but there is another concern here about not having future victims. We need to have a corrections system that functions to ensure we reintegrate people into society and we do not create problems for other families in the future.

There is a wide range of reasons why escorted and unescorted temporary absences are granted to those in custody. This bill would not affect most of those, but it is important to note how these temporary absences are used. They are often used for rehabilitation programs, including drug and alcohol treatment which is not available in the institution the person is in. This is a particular concern with the very large number of people that we have in our prisons with alcohol and drug addictions.

Private Members' Business

The temporary absences are also used for significant family events, like terminal illnesses or funerals. They are also used for interesting things that people might not think about, like job interviews for positions after release from prison. If we want people successfully reintegrated into society and they are in prison, how can they get a job? An escorted temporary absence to a job interview might be an important part of that reintegration into society.

Sometimes the absences are used for training that is not available in prisons. When people get out, they need skills to earn a living, support themselves and not be a further burden on the public. Sometimes these temporary absences are in structured situations where people get the training they need. Again, this is very important to public safety after they get out of prison.

There are a wide variety of legitimate reasons which, in fact, contribute to public safety and prevent future victimization by preparing inmates for more successful reintegration into all of our communities upon their release.

What am I worried about in the bill? I am worried about the proposed solution. It is not the concerns. As I have said, we share those concerns. However, as I asked the member for Oxford earlier about the proposed solution, can the Parole Board actually deal with each and every application for an escorted temporary absence from nearly 3,000 inmates in custody at the present time? Do we have the personnel to do this? Do we have the financial resources?

The Parole Board, as I mentioned in my question, now has a backlog of 20,000 pardon applications. It has said that it will not clear these applications until the end of 2015. It would have to hire 1,000 temporary workers to try to attack the problem of pardons.

Why are pardons important? Pardons are important because they are the way that people can get employment after they have completed their sentences and want to be reintegrated into the community. That pardon part, of course, does not apply to those convicted of murder. There is no such thing in Canada. Life in Canada actually means life under supervision.

The Parole Board is already dealing with these other applications and it has had its budget cut by \$3 million in this current fiscal year.

It is important to remember that the Correctional Service of Canada reports that 99% of temporary absences are completed successfully.

There was a letter published in the *Montreal Gazette* in July, when this bill was introduced, written by Peter Huish, who is the Chaplain-Coordinator of the Montreal area. He is the person who organizes work with those who are being released from prison and he has a very intimate knowledge of what happens with both escorted and unescorted temporary absences. In his letter, he emphasized the "significant contributions to effective eventual parole" that escorted and unescorted temporary absences play in our system. This is someone who works with offenders every day, in and out. He also emphasizes that the vast majority, in fact almost all, of these are successfully completed.

What do we need to ensure that the small number are successfully completed? The corrections system needs more resources for the

security reviews that the wardens rely on before making those decisions.

What do we need to ensure that those escorted temporary absences are safe for the public and the corrections staff? We have had a reduction of resources, meaning that many times, an offender who would need two people on the escorted absence, because of the complexity of the absence or travel involved, is instead escorted by a single corrections officer. Therefore, it is a question of resources in the corrections system that would take care of most of the security.

• (1755)

We on this side do share the concerns that families of victims have about escorted temporary absences. We share the concerns that corrections officials have about single accompaniment in these absences. In committee, we will be proposing that this bill be amended significantly. We need to hear from victims. We need to hear from those who work with offenders.

We believe a solution may be found in having the Parole Board make the initial determination on whether an offender is eligible for temporary absences, then leaving the specific decisions on individual absences to the wardens. This would allow victims to be heard in the parole system, as the member for Oxford suggested. I hope he is willing to consider that this may be the solution to the problem he is trying to solve without placing that undue burden on the Parole Board and without inadvertently eliminating an important part of our system, which helps reintegrate prisoners into society.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I usually say that I am pleased to speak on a bill, but if I am being honest, I am not really pleased to be speaking on Bill C-483 in the fashion it has come forward. My colleague who just spoke mentioned some of those areas.

When the member for Oxford started off, he gave a great rendition of the Safe Streets and Communities Act and the government's tough on crime agenda and all of that. It sounds wonderful when it is talked about that way. However, what are we doing dealing with all these private members' bills coming up one by one? Where is the discussion within the government caucus? Do they not discuss these matters?

I mean, we are talking about the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. We are talking about very complicated pieces of legislation.

My colleague who spoke earlier talked about the different rules for private members' bills, and it is true. With this kind of mishmash of private members' bills coming forward from the Conservative backbench, we could be complicating the justice system and could end up with results we do not want.

Private Members' Business

I have a list of private members' bills. There are some 16 related to the Criminal Code that are all coming forward as private members' bills. Let us be honest. Why are they using these bills, like this one from the member for Oxford? It is a real concern. I agree with the concern in terms of the victims, but why is it not coming forward as a comprehensive piece of legislation from the Government of Canada?

Is what we are really seeing from members on the backbench over there, in collusion with the government, a bit of a farce? Are Conservatives having private members come up with bills so they can tout what they have done for victims at home?

The parliamentary secretary got up a moment ago, and it sounds as if she is fully in favour of this proposal. Well, why did it not come forward as a piece of government legislation? This parliamentary secretary is close to the minister. Why did it not come forward as a well-thought-out piece of legislation?

My concern is with the process. If this place is going to work effectively, then the government itself should come forward with legislation such as this in a well-thought-out fashion that is comprehensive, not piecemeal.

I am getting a little heckling, but it is all right. They can heckle, because I know that sometimes the truth hurts.

I think that is what we are seeing from government backbench members in collusion with the government. They are bringing forward bills so they can showcase themselves at home on all they are doing for criminal justice, when really, the government has failed in its responsibility to do it in a comprehensive way.

In terms of this particular bill, we will, regardless of what I have said, support it going to committee for examination. It is our expectation that we may be able to get some answers from the member for Oxford at those committee hearings.

On the issue of severely limiting the ability of individual wardens to grant such temporary releases, I think the committee process will enable us, as members, to raise questions and allow the member to provide evidence to demonstrate a clear need that requires such legislative changes.

My colleague who spoke before talked about the victims, and the member for Oxford talked about the victims. I know that he tries to paint us as not there for victims and being there for the offenders. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, how can it be done in a way that actually enhances public safety and protects the interests of victims?

• (1800)

We are certainly not as likely to do it in this piecemeal approach that we see by the Government of Canada. This is not really a private member's bill. It is a Government of Canada bill by the back door.

The targeting of only those convicted of first and second degree murder in the legislation implies that both in terms of the number of offenders involved and the likelihood of their early release represents a threat to the community. Is that the case? I am asking the member upfront now. Could he provide us some evidence in that regard? We need to hear it.

I have not heard any evidence. I raised this question. Could the member provide us with evidence where offenders have indeed committed an offence when they are released under the escorted temporary release? He did not answer that question. He just went on his attack that we did not like victims. It is not the way to do legislation.

There is no argument that the temporary release programs for all offenders must be well managed and that only those offenders who have met a certain set of criteria should be eligible for such a program. I really do not disagree with the member that the victim's family should have a right to be heard, but I do not necessarily agree that this is the way to do it.

The legislation, as I have said, is not supported by evidence indicating an abuse of the escorted temporary release program, which would justify these kinds of legislative changes.

What remains to be seen is to what degree the legislation is actually addressing an issue, or whether, as I indicated earlier, it is an example of the Conservative Party playing to its base and trying to create an issue. That seems to be where we are at.

The government members had the opportunity in 2011 to seek amendments such as this in Bill C-10, the so-called Safe Streets and Communities Act, but they failed to bring them forward at that time and they certainly failed to bring forward all these other 16 that are on here that are private members' bills. Why was it not done in a comprehensive way?

What C-10 did provide for, according to the legislative summary, was for "The Commissioner of the CSC, Correctional Service Canada, to make rules regarding the circumstances in which the institutional head may authorize escorted temporary releases and work releases".

Even the former minister of public safety appeared content with the new restrictions imposed with respect to temporary absences when he testified before the justice committee on October 6, 2011, not that long ago.

The question remains this, and I asked the member to come forward to committee with this: what significant public safety issue is being addressed with Bill C-483? Is there any?

I will not go through all the areas for which escorted temporary releases are granted, but indeed, as others before me have said, we are concerned about the families and we have to find a way of addressing that. However, I do not think the approach to find the way to address that is to haphazardly, through private members' bills, change the Corrections and Conditional Release Act or the Criminal Code. It needs to be done in a more comprehensive way.

We just dealt with a private member's bill at committee. It was amended extensively. That work should have been done by the Department of Justice. It should have been done by the government as a whole, showing leadership to make the criminal justice system better in terms of protecting victims' rights and enhancing public safety.

Private Members' Business

• (1805)

That is my concern, that we are seeing these private members' bills come forward as if they are playing a game when the real issue is, yes, victims' rights and public safety, and the government should be showing the leadership to do so.

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my remarks by once again thanking the member for Oxford for bringing forward this common sense proposal.

His law enforcement background clearly provides a wealth of experience, which contributes to practical solutions to keep Canadians safe. His efforts with the bill would give a voice to victims and their families. Victims have long demanded that more be done to ensure that their rights come before the rights of criminals. Giving victims a stronger voice is a key priority for our government, something we clearly laid out in the Speech from the Throne.

Since we were first elected in 2006, our Conservative government has taken steps to end the imbalance created in our justice system by the previous Liberal governments, which replaced bars with a revolving door. Shockingly, Trudeau-era solicitor general, Jean-Pierre Goyer, said that they have decided from now on to stress the rights of criminals rather than the protection of society. That is shameful.

Is it any surprise that the victims of crimes and their families have felt that they are an afterthought in the current justice system? Unlike the Liberals, our Conservative government has listened to the concerns of victims and we have clearly acted. We have pushed ahead with common sense reforms to right these past wrongs. We have done so because we believe that victims have a role to play at the heart of the justice system. Strengthening the justice system to support victims of crime requires us to tackle the issue of crime from all angles, and this is exactly what we have done. We have made significant investments in crime prevention programs to keep at-risk youth out of gangs, and we are providing police with the tools and resources they need to do their jobs.

In many cases, helping our police means bringing in new laws that give them improved powers to investigate crimes, make arrests and keep criminals off the streets for appropriate amounts of time. We have passed laws to ensure that those who break the law are held accountable for their actions, where sentences match the severity of the crimes committed. We have also brought in a number of measures that emphasize offender accountability, from enshrining correctional plans into law to ensuring prisoners cannot withdraw their parole application at the last minute, and ensuring that prisoners are paying for their own room and board.

While I could speak for hours about all of our Conservative government's accomplishments, the bill we are here to talk about today relates to escorted temporary absences from prison. More specifically, it is about ensuring that only the Parole Board of Canada has the power to release prisoners except in very limited circumstances.

Currently, for prisoners serving indeterminate sentences, the authorization for ETAs, or escorted temporary absences, falls either

to the Correctional Service of Canada, CSC, or the Parole Board of Canada, depending for the most part on how much of his or her sentence a prisoner has completed. Aside from some minor exceptions, the Parole Board is typically in charge of approving escorted temporary absences from the start of the sentence until the prisoner reaches day parole eligibility.

After that point, the Correctional Service of Canada takes over for all prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for the remainder of their sentence, in other words, until the day they are granted parole and conditionally released into the community. As the member for Oxford has said, we continue to hear calls from victims of crime who feel that decisions on these absences should remain with the Parole Board, rather than an unaccountable official. Victims want assurances that violent offenders who are serving time for murder are only granted escorted temporary absences after a rigorous process of checks and balances similar to that used to grant parole.

The legislation before us was born out of those concerns. It proposes changes to the current system that aim to alleviate this stress and help victims of crime feel greater confidence in the escorted temporary absence system. Under the proposed legislation, the Parole Board would be granted almost exclusive authority for making decisions on escorted temporary absences for first- or second-degree murders. Our Conservative government supports the intent of the proposed legislation. We will introduce amendments at committee to address some concerns regarding duplication and operational considerations.

We are ensuring that the concerns of victims are respected, and that the corrections system actually corrects criminal behaviour. I applaud the member for Oxford for bringing forward Bill C-483. I believe that the bill would continue to move us in the right direction. This is just one more example of how our government is working hard to support the victims of crime.

• (1810)

In the coming months, we will push forward with more initiatives and legislation, with the same determination we have shown in the past seven years. We will do everything in our power to ensure that public safety comes first. This is what Canadians have asked us to do, and this is what we will continue to do.

We will support this legislation, with amendments, and I hope that just for once, the NDP and Liberals will support this legislation that puts the rights of victims first.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-483 deals with an extremely delicate matter. On this side of the House, one of our main concerns is having a free society, a great place to live where neighbourhoods and streets are peaceful and safe. We are quite concerned about public safety.

This bill affects victims, the families of victims, the correctional system and conditional release under the justice system. It is a very delicate subject.

Private Members' Business

We have before us Bill C-483, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (escorted temporary absence). This bill has parameters and limits that sometimes are quite broad and other times are narrow.

We are convinced that this amendment of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act has merit. However, there are certain problems because the Conservatives are once again using a private member's bill to develop and spread their repressive ideology. Once again, rehabilitation is not a consideration.

There are certainly cases in which parole and supervision are not options. However, in some cases, people are sincere and should perhaps be supervised. They should be supervised after the first offence, however, before they commit first degree murder. These are people who may have a lengthy record, but they could be rehabilitated and reformed so that they can reintegrate into society. Many people are sincere, but are they in an environment where they are receiving the supervision they need? That is the question.

This is the fourth time in one year that we are seeing a private member's bill designed to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. These are sensitive topics. The government is the one that should have introduced a bill to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

The system has its positives and negatives. For many years, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have made cuts to human resources, financial resources and infrastructure.

That is why we could have used more than an hour at second reading to discuss this bill in the House. It would have been worth spending more time discussing a reform of the corrections system and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

Nevertheless, the NDP will support this bill at second reading, because we believe in the principle of having the Parole Board of Canada making the initial decision about whether a detainee should be allowed a temporary absence before being paroled.

However, it is not realistic to require the board to make all of the decisions regarding these absences, which could be granted to 2,880 detainees, to be exact. That is why I said that the Parole Board of Canada will be short of time and resources.

In reality, since the Conservative government took power, it has made some draconian budget cuts to all sectors of correctional services. Corrections officers have been repeatedly trying to update their old terms of employment, since the environment is changing. I wanted to say, "evolving", but that is not true.

● (1815)

The prison system is not evolving. Serious and violent crime is on the rise, as are all sorts of other crimes. More and more people are being imprisoned for terrorist activities, and there are more and more crimes related to cyberbullying. Crimes are increasingly varied and serious and affect several segments of society.

The corrections system is in constant flux. People who work in the system should be given an environment, the financial resources and the infrastructure to be able to do their job. The same is true for the

Parole Board of Canada. Clearly, it does not have the necessary resources to carry out the tasks in this bill.

The Conservatives cannot continue slashing the parole board's budget while asking it to do more. As a result of other legislation passed by the Conservatives, the backlog of pardon applications to the Parole Board of Canada has reached 20,000, and they would like to do more. I do not know how many years it would take to process 20,000 applications. Clearly, the board is not able to keep up with everything being asked of it. If this bill is not amended, it will not work, and implementing it will be impossible.

I talked about the critical importance of rehabilitation. I would like to share a story with you. It took me a while to decide whether to share this story because it is about a family I am close to that lost a loved one who was murdered by a repeat sex offender. Nobody ever took a real interest in that offender, so he ended up committing several crimes. The whole time he was in the system, he never had a chance at rehabilitation. It ended with murder.

That person did not have a chance to use the resources available in the justice system, to get therapy, to get the kind of supervision he needed to reintegrate into society. Not even once. It ended with murder. A family's loved one was murdered. For all intents and purposes, life for the victim's family is over. After something like that, people can never get back to normal. I am not talking about the victim or the prisoner; I am talking about the victim's family. After such a tragedy, family members lose their bearings and life no longer has any meaning.

However, in a modern, industrialized and prosperous society, it would have been quite easy to provide resources for rehabilitation, whether to address recidivism with regard to alcohol, drugs, spousal abuse, sexual offences or cyberbullying. Governments are not coming to grips with the situation.

Rather than coming up with bills containing more repressive measures, we must address rehabilitation and education. It would just be a matter of engaging with people on the ground before it is too late. However, here we have yet another bill that takes away decision-making authority from prison wardens. They do an exceptional job with the resources they have. They are there on the ground and they are capable of making decisions. This power is being taken away from them and given to the Parole Board of Canada, which is already overloaded.

As I said, the goal of the bill appears very noble, but it will be impossible to make it work on the ground. The resources available at the moment make that impossible.

● (1820)

I am asking the government to co-operate. Then, when the bill goes to committee after second reading, I am asking the government to accept the amendments, be they from the NDP or from the Liberal Party.

People who have worked on the ground have suggestions that will make the bill easier to implement, so that the society we live in can be safer for everyone.

Private Members' Business

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East to resume debate, I will let him know that there are only about six minutes remaining in the time allocated for private members' business for this evening. I am not sure if he will need all of that time, but if he does, we have six minutes. Of course, he will have his remaining time when the House next resumes debate on the question, should he need it.

The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

• (1825)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak in the House today in support of Bill C-483, a private member's bill that proposes to amend the current scheme for escorted temporary absences.

I would like to begin by explaining the purpose of these types of absences and why we have them as part of the conditional release process. Later on, I will explain who has the responsibility for authorizing escorted temporary absences and when.

The purpose of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act is simply to correct criminal behaviour. Escorted temporary absences, when used sparingly and appropriately, can help to meet that goal. They help reconstitute prisoners by allowing them to participate in programs that may not be offered inside prison walls. Escorted temporary absences are typically the first type of conditional release prisoners may be granted. Escorted temporary absences are usually very short. The prisoner is typically only out of prison, under escort, for a few hours.

In reviewing an application, the safety of the public is the paramount consideration in deciding whether to authorize a prisoner's escorted temporary absence. The level of security required during the absence is determined by the level of risk the prisoner poses to the community. For a high-risk prisoner, a correctional officer and the use of physical restraints, such as handcuffs and leg restraints, would be deemed necessary to ensure public safety.

In this instance, the absence would only be granted for a required absence such as for a medical appointment or a court proceeding. A prisoner's behaviour while on an escorted temporary absence assists the Correctional Service of Canada in determining whether or not he or she would be a good candidate for parole.

Now I would like to take a few moments to explain who has releasing authority for these absences and at which point in a prisoner's sentence these absences may be granted.

To begin, releasing authority for prisoners serving life sentences is set out in section 746.1 of the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code gives the Parole Board of Canada authority to approve absences from the start of a sentence up until the prisoner reaches day parole eligibility.

For those serving life sentences, day parole occurs when prisoners are within three years of being eligible to apply for full parole. Currently, at this point, the Correctional Service of Canada takes over responsibility to grant short escorted absences for the remainder of the life sentence, or until the prisoner is released on parole. After that point, in other words, after the day parole eligibility date, the

releasing authority moves to Correctional Service of Canada for the remainder of the life sentence. This is how decisions to authorize escorted temporary absences to prisoners serving life sentences works today.

Victims have expressed concerns about how decisions on escorted temporary absence applications are being made and they have asked for more involvement in the decision-making process.

I would like to tell the House about Kim Hancox-Spencer. She is a woman who lives in my riding, who had to suffer the unthinkable tragedy of losing her husband, a Toronto police officer, to a cold-blooded killer.

After that fateful day in August 1998, she found herself a single mother with nowhere to turn. Some 14 years into the life sentence of her husband's killer, Kim received a letter from Corrections Canada that said, "This letter is to notify you that the warden of this [prisoner]'s institution has authorized four additional escorted temporary absences" and "we will not be notifying you every time this prisoner leaves the institution".

This was granted by the warden despite the fact that the Parole Board of Canada ruled that the prisoner was not ready to go on temporary absences.

We are here to protect the safety of the community and the safety also of the prisoner. I heard that many of my colleagues are concerned about how prisoners are reintegrated into society. However, if they are not ready to go into society, they represent a problem for society and for themselves. This type of ignorance of the rights of a victim of a horrific crime is nothing short of shameful.

• (1830)

Let us listen, in her words, to how victims and their families are often abandoned by the current process. She said, "You end up reliving it over and over again.... No one told me about this". She goes on to say that this temporary absence scheme is "...absolutely a loophole...". On this side of the House, we are here today to close this loophole.

Our government has made a number of changes to our laws to address a wide range of victims' concerns and to ensure they are given a greater voice in the corrections and conditional release systems. Chief among these measures is our guarantee of a victim's participation in Parole Board hearings, which can be found in the Safe Streets and Communities Act.

Bill C-483 proposes to grant the Parole Board almost exclusive decision-making authority for escorted temporary absences. Ultimately, the goal of Bill C-483 is to give the Parole Board greater authority over escorted temporary absences for murderers.

Our Conservative government is pleased to support the efforts of the member for Oxford.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East will have four minutes remaining, should he wish it, when the House next resumes debate on the question.

Private Members' Business

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has expired. The order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

It being 6:31 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:31 p.m.)

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