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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 10, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 10, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

INFORMATION COMMISSIONER OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 39(1) of the Access to Information Act, a special report from the Information Commissioner entitled, “Interference with Access to Information: Part 2”.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

FIRST NATIONS CONTROL OF FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION ACT

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-33, An Act to establish a framework to enable First Nations control of elementary and secondary education and to provide for related funding and to make related amendments to the Indian Act and consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the

delegation of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, concerning its participation at the bureau meeting of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, which was held in Rabat, Morocco, from February 5 to 7, 2014.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Health, entitled “Government's Role in Addressing Prescription Drug Abuse”.

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

* * *

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE IN REGULATIONS ACT

Hon. John Duncan (for the Minister of Justice) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Statutory Instruments Act and to make consequential amendments to the Statutory Instruments Regulations.

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

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask for the unanimous consent of the House of Commons for Motion No. 476, which simply asks that the House of Commons affirms that every Canadian law must be interpreted in a manner that recognizes in law the equal worth and dignity of everyone who is in fact a human being. Who here wants to deny the equal worth and dignity of any fellow human being?

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you would find agreement for the following motion. I move:

Routine Proceedings

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of the said motion shall be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, April 28, 2014, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

CANADA POST

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present to the House with regard to Canada Post.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. It is a great pleasure to present this first petition on behalf of constituents in my riding of Newton—North Delta and surrounding areas.

The proposal to transfer coal through the Fraser Surrey Docks has raised concern for many people living in Surrey and Delta.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to carry out a comprehensive health impact assessment of the proposed expansion of coal transfers at the Fraser Surrey Docks.

Like my constituents, I look forward to the government's response to their request for a third-party assessment of the health impacts of this project.

●(1010)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition, if I can lift it, is from thousands upon thousands of Canadians across this beautiful land who are very concerned with the so-called unfair elections act.

The petitioners are calling on the government to launch a public inquiry and to table electoral reform legislation that incorporates the recommendations of Elections Canada.

I urge the government to take action and take heed of this voluminous petition.

CANADA POST

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I present a petition regarding Canada Post.

The most rural and remote areas, which I was going to say are slowly dwindling, but that is not the case anymore, they have been accelerated at a rate that is absolutely blistering, to the point where the citizens are signing these petitions.

This petition comes from the town of Millertown. There are approximately 20 to 30 households there right now, and they want their postal delivery service. They feel that the service has been diminished to the point where it is no longer recognizable.

These signatures come from people from Millertown and nearby Buchans Junction.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise to present a petition gathered at the good offices of the Council of Canadians. It is called the Democracy 24/7 petition.

The petitioners note that the Federal Court ruled that the Conservative Party's CIMS database was at the bottom of the fraud perpetuated in 2011.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to launch a public inquiry to find and bring to justice the persons responsible for accessing that database for purposes of perpetuating the fraud that occurred in 2011.

They are also calling for the tabling of electoral reform legislation that incorporates real recommendations of Elections Canada to get to the bottom of fraud or corrupt or illegal practices, which is exactly the opposite of the unfair elections act.

CANADA POST

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I bring forward a petition in regard to Canada Post, signed by the residents of Winnipeg North.

The petitioners truly believe in Canada Post as a national corporation and are concerned that the federal government is looking at ways in which it can ultimately dismantle Canada Post.

The petitioners are calling on the Prime Minister to recognize that the Parliament of Canada should commit to maintaining and expanding the future role of Canada Post as a government corporation.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of constituents from Surrey North.

The petition concerns the Fraser Surrey Docks proposal to ship U. S. thermal coal through B.C. communities.

Many members of my community are concerned about health risks to the children and the communities in Surrey North, and along the corridor for shipping the coal.

The petitioners are calling on the government to do a health impact assessment before this project goes ahead. I would ask the government to respond to the petition.

The Speaker: There are more than 10 members rising and only about 10 minutes left for this part of the day. Members would do their colleagues a favour if they kept their explanations to a very brief summary.

Routine Proceedings

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, who believe that the federal government has a responsibility to support economic growth, but also the lasting benefits to Canadians through a modernized greener infrastructure.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to support clean, efficient, quiet, and modern rail transportation, through the electrification of the air-rail link in Toronto. It borders on my riding and many other ridings in the city of Toronto.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC TRANSIT OPERATORS

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition to put a stop to violence against bus drivers. The petitioners want to draw the attention of the House of Commons to the high number of assaults every year against bus drivers who serve the public.

[*English*]

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES DEVOLUTION ACT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of the government a petition from the Gwich'in citizens of my riding in the Northwest Territories, who have put forward a petition to speak to the unfair provisions within Bill C-15, under the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act's sector.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions.

The first petition is from Families for Justice, saying that the current impaired driving laws are much too lenient.

The petitioners are calling for new mandatory minimum sentencing for people who have been convicted of impaired driving causing death.

• (1015)

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from constituents who are very concerned that there is discrimination against girls occurring through sex selection.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to condemn that.

[*Translation*]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians from across the country who wish to point out that the Federal Court found that unprecedented fraud took place during the last election, when voters who were known to be non-Conservative supporters were prevented from voting, and that the Conservative Party database was used. The petitioners are calling for a public inquiry into the matter.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions.

The first one is from citizens who call upon the current government to launch an inquiry into the attempts at voter fraud and suppression in the 2011 election's so-called robocall scandal.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, which is very timely today, is from Canadians from coast to coast, who are calling for the protection of stable and secure funding for the public broadcaster, the CBC.

[*Translation*]

VIA RAIL

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present several petitions today, all on the same subject, specifically the deterioration of VIA Rail service in eastern Canada, especially in northern New Brunswick and eastern Quebec, including in my riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

The petitioners not only want better service, but they are also calling on the federal government to invest in a section of railway between Miramichi and Bathurst in order to keep the network running from coast to coast in Canada.

[*English*]

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition, signed by literally tens of thousands of Canadians, who call upon the House of Commons and Parliament here assembled to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known and that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial and occupational causes combined.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos, in all of its forms, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

[*Translation*]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions to present.

The first petition calls on the Government of Canada to launch a public inquiry into the fraudulent use of the Conservative Party's database during the 41st general election.

VIA RAIL

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the three other petitions have been signed by more than 200 people who are calling on the Government of Canada to contribute the funding necessary for the repair and maintenance of the rail lines between Bathurst and Miramichi.

Routine Proceedings

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition signed by hundreds of people from Laval, Terrebonne, Mascouche and Longueuil. They are calling for the creation of an effective and independent legislated ombudsman mechanism for Canada's mining sector.

On that note, I would like to thank everyone who is working with Development and Peace, including the Saint-François-de-Sales parish, for their involvement in this issue.

[English]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to participate in the presentation of thousands of petitions, signed by Canadians from coast to coast to coast. It is the Council of Canadians' Democracy 24/7 petition. In part, it calls upon the Government of Canada to launch a public inquiry to find and bring to justice the person or persons responsible for accessing the Conservative Party of Canada CIMS database for the purpose of perpetrating election fraud in the 41st general election, and calls upon the government to table electoral reform legislation that will protect voters from being victimized by election fraud again.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a petition signed by thousands of people who are calling for a public inquiry into alleged fraud during the 2011 election. They are also calling on the government to implement genuine electoral reform that would give everyone a vote.

CANADA POST

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to the House a petition that has been signed by more than 1,500 people from my riding, Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, and from Lower St. Lawrence and eastern Quebec. They are protesting Canada Post's decision to reduce service and eliminate home mail delivery. They are also protesting other measures such as the drastic increase in postage rates.

These 1,500 people are adding their names to the thousands that have already been collected and presented to the House to call on the Conservative government to take action and force Canada Post to continue serving the rural areas and regions that truly need it.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by thousands of Canadians who are concerned about our democracy. They want to protect our Democracy 24/7. They are calling for a public inquiry into the fraud that occurred during the last election.

• (1020)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my nine years in this House, I have never before had a petition of this nature with this volume of signatures. Thousands

upon thousands of people are concerned with the 41st general election campaign and the accusations of fraud. As well, they are concerned about Bill C-23 and they are petitioning this House to put in electoral reform that takes into account the recommendations of Elections Canada to establish enforceable standards. In my time here, I have not before seen anything like this.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am proud to rise on behalf of the people of Davenport in the great city of Toronto who are among thousands who signed the Council of Canadians Democracy 24/7 petition. The petitioners are very concerned about the findings of the federal court, and they call on the government to launch an inquiry. They want real democratic electoral reform in this country.

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by hundreds if not thousands of people. The petition was initiated by the Canadian Council for Democracy and calls for the electoral reform to include the recommendations proposed by Elections Canada so that every vote counts and everyone can participate in Canada's democracy.

[English]

CANADA POST

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions signed by constituents of mine from Dartmouth and surrounding areas. The petitioners are concerned about the cuts to Canada Post. They are concerned about postal services for themselves and for members of their community. They want to ensure those cut services are restored.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: Question No. 311.

[Text]

Question No. 311—**Ms. Yvonne Jones:**

With regard to national parks, what is the detailed breakdown, by fiscal year and nature or purpose, of all expenditures related to the establishment of Mealy Mountains National Park, made pursuant to the \$5.5 million in funding over five years referred to on page 115 of the 2011 budget plan tabled in the House of Commons on June 6, 2011?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2011 stated that the next phase of Canada's economic action plan would be "providing 5.5 million over 5 years to establish the Mealy Mountains National Park in Labrador".

Privilege

The proposed national park reserve in the Mealy Mountains region of Labrador has yet to be formally established. Parks Canada is working to conclude negotiations of the required establishment agreements with the province and aboriginal groups. It is therefore premature to speculate on budget 2011 breakdowns, as these funds will only start to be spent once establishment agreements have been negotiated.

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

REMARKS BY MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am rising today with great exasperation and frustration on a question of privilege pursuant to section 48(1) of the Standing Orders, regarding misleading information that the Minister of State for Democratic Reform has provided to the House. I say I am exasperated because members know as well as I do that in the past few months, my colleagues and I from the NDP official opposition caucus have had to stand up many times in the House to denounce misleading comments by members of the opposite side.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to read from a statement you made yesterday in the House: “As has been suggested, the information shared in this House does hold extraordinary value as it forms the basis upon which decisions are made in the House”.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that we raised a similar question of privilege in March 2012 with regard to the comments made by the then minister of Human Resources and Social Development, who said that there was no quota system for recovering EI payments when in fact there was.

We also raised a similar question of privilege in October 2013, when we brought to the House's attention the Prime Minister's misleading statements concerning his office's involvement in the Wright-Duffy scandal.

[English]

We raised a question on the 100% fabricated evidence from the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, who said in this House he had witnessed cases of voter fraud when, in fact, he simply had not.

Finally, just two weeks ago we raised a similar question regarding misleading comments from the minister of state for finance, who manipulated numbers to justify his party's opposition to the NDP's CPP expansion plan.

[Translation]

My colleagues and I do not just raise these questions of privilege for fun, far from it. I would rather not have to rise in the House and waste the precious little time that we are given for debates—which is

often cut short by this government—to ask the House to look into misleading comments once again made by a minister.

However, as the opposition House leader, it is my duty to raise these questions and to hold the government responsible for what it tells the House and Canadians.

• (1025)

[English]

Therefore, it is with some irritation that I want to present to you today the facts concerning the specific case at hand: the comments made by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

During question period in this House on Wednesday, April 2, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform was asked why he was ready to disenfranchise thousands of Canadians by removing voter ID cards as possible forms of identification for voters. This is what the member replied on April 2:

There are regular reports of people receiving multiple cards and using them to vote multiple times. That, too, can be found on the Elections Canada website.

If this were true, it would indeed be concerning. As we all know, voting multiple times is a serious legal offence. That is why the NDP followed up on his statement. We searched Elections Canada's website and we asked witnesses at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, currently studying Bill C-23, if there were, in fact, cases of people using multiple cards to vote multiple times.

The answer we found is unambiguous. There is only one documented case of this, as we well know, which was a gag by the Quebec TV show *Infoman*. Therefore, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is blatantly misleading the House when he said there are “regular reports” of voters voting multiple times.

We tried to give the minister of state a chance to correct the record during question period on April 3, the following day, when the leader of the official opposition, the NDP leader, asked him to give us examples of these “regular reports of people receiving multiple cards and using them to vote multiple times”. At that time, the minister of state actually changed his story.

On April 3, he replied:

In fact, there are documented cases where people received multiple voter information cards. I gave the example, which was documented by the French CBC, where two Montrealers each received two voter information cards and therefore each voted twice.

In his reply, the minister of state could only resort to citing, again, one single example that exists of voters voting multiple times, but he changed his story from “regular reports of people receiving multiple cards and using them to vote multiple times” to “cases where people received multiple voter information cards”.

Privilege

In his answer on April 2, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform was referring to the reports showing that there are cases of people receiving more than one voter card. However, none of these reports say that the people in question actually used these to vote more than once. The minister of state knew this, and therefore misled the House when he manipulated the information to add, from his own fertile imagination, that people had used their voter cards to vote multiple times.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, if you are still not convinced, allow me to tell you about the many witnesses who appeared before the committee and who all told us that there was no evidence of systemic or organized voter fraud.

Harry Neufeld, the former chief electoral officer of British Columbia, said:

[*English*]

“There was no evidence of fraud whatsoever”, in the cases he reviewed, and that he has “only been privy to a handful of cases of voter fraud” in his entire career.

Marc Mayrand, Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada, also said that there was no systemic or organized voter fraud.

How, then, can the Minister of State for Democratic Reform claim that Elections Canada has documented multiple cases of voter fraud?

[*Translation*]

I will not take the time here today to mention all the precedents where it was found that prima facie contempt had occurred when members misled the House. I will spare members in the House from that today, since we have talked about those cases before when other similar incidents occurred, incidents which are unfortunately far too frequent.

[*English*]

Let me simply remind the House that, according to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, on page 115, “... Misleading a Minister or a Member has also been considered a form of obstruction and thus a *prima facie* breach of privilege”.

Moreover, and this is the essence of the matter, the *Parliamentary Practice*, 22nd edition, by Erskine May states the following on page 63 that “...it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity”.

Mr. Speaker, I see that you are getting tired of this, as are New Democrats, and so are Canadians. Canadians are tired of the misleading comments from the other side. We are tired of the Conservative government’s misleading the House in order to justify its wrong-headed policies.

The opposition to the unfair elections act is mounting and virtually unanimous. Conservatives stand to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters who, by many assessments, are coincidentally not usually Conservative voters. To justify this, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform had to resort to making up stories in the

House because he simply could not find real evidence to bring forward. All he has is one single gag by Infoman.

The Minister of State for Democratic Reform has, one, offered misleading statements to the House; two, did so knowingly; and, three, he did so with the deliberate intent to mislead parliamentarians. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to find that a prima facie contempt of the House exists in this case.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, since the problem of ministers knowingly misleading the House seems to be becoming endemic in the Conservative government, I would appreciate receiving guidance from you as to how we can put an end to the practice of government benches providing misleading information to parliamentarians and to the Canadian public.

● (1030)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will address directly a few of the comments made by my colleague opposite, but before I do, let us make sure that everyone here is completely aware of what is going on here. This is merely a superficial attempt by the opposition to try to cut into the time allocated to the Liberal Party on its opposition day.

You will notice that it started early, Mr. Speaker. When you entertained and asked for petitions, we had probably 20 or 25 petitioners stand up. I will also point out that whenever it is an NDP opposition day, nobody on that side from the NDP benches stands up. They do so to deliberately try to cut into the time of the members in the Liberal Party during their opposition day. This is a similar tactic.

It is merely a superficial, with no merit whatsoever, attempt to cut into the debate on an opposition day for one of the NDP’s opponents. I suspect that this is, quite clearly, because they are a little afraid of the polling results that show the Liberals may be cutting into—

The Speaker: Order. Whatever the parliamentary secretary might be reading into the motives of the official opposition House leader, I do hope that he does not end up achieving the same thing by speaking to this point without actually getting to the substance of the point that the member has raised. I would ask him to restrain his remarks to the actual point the official opposition House leader has raised.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and I will make it very short so my colleagues in the Liberal Party can get into their opposition day. However, I do reserve the right, of course, to bring back a more detailed response at a later date, perhaps when we do not cut into the opposition day that any of the parties opposite have.

At the committee on procedure and House affairs, there have been many examples given where voter information cards have been handed out multiple times to the same individual. Yes, we had the Infoman example. We have also had others who have testified.

Frankly, there have been prosecutions based on the fact that others have said that they have voted on more than one occasion. It is documented in that committee under the title “Prosecutions”, because we were pointing out that prosecutions have been made, in a limited sense, over the last number of years. The only reason prosecutions have gone forward is that people have come forward voluntarily and said they had voted multiple times. Today, as the committee is starting in about 25 minutes, we will have additional evidence from a witness who has brought testimony of having witnessed voter fraud and attempts at voter fraud.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is merely an attempt by the opposition to try to cut into my colleagues’ time on the Liberal side. We will bring back a more detailed response at a later date. I ask you now, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps you can allow my colleagues on the Liberal benches to bring forward their motion for meaningful debate.

• (1035)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I just wish to support the official opposition in concern. The debate in this place on Bill C-23 could very well lead to not just it misleading Parliament, but my concern is that it would mislead the Canadian electorate.

We have had the repeated reference to 39 pieces of ID as though any one of them would allow a Canadian to vote. I know that slips are made when people are in debate, but it is very clear that one could go to the polls with six or seven pieces of ID off that list and still be denied one’s right to vote, without recourse to vouching. Therefore, we need to be very careful. This is one of the reasons why bills that deal with the fairness of Canadian elections should never be dealt with in circumstances of limiting debate and pushing things through without full political consensus to support something so fundamental.

The Speaker: I thank hon. members for their submissions and look forward to further submissions, as the parliamentary secretary has indicated he would like to return to the House. Of course, I will wait for that.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—TIME ALLOCATION AND CLOSURE

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.)** moved:

That Standing Order 78 be amended by adding the following:

“(4) No motion, pursuant to any paragraph of this Standing Order, may be used to allocate a specified number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.”;

and that Standing Order 57 be amended by adding the following:

“, provided that the resolution or resolutions, clause or clauses, section or sections, preamble or preambles, title or titles, being considered do not pertain to any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.”.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in light of what just took place, I have never seen a larger, more concentrated effort to keep me silent since I last spoke to my own lawyer.

Business of Supply

I appreciate the efforts from all members to encourage us to debate and to have a robust discussion on what we consider to be the changing of some of the Standing Orders that we have here today. Essentially, that is what we are doing here today.

In light of the debate that has taken place over Bill C-23, we have proceeded with second reading, we have voted, and it is now with the committee on procedure and House affairs. The substance of that debate, of course, was about the ability of Elections Canada to do its job. It was also about the ability of the average Canadian citizen surpassing the three elements of being over the age of 18, being a Canadian citizen, and residing in a certain riding in which they are entitled to vote.

I say “entitled”, because that goes to the very core of many of our values, such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We are talking about section 3, which is the ability to vote.

What brings us here today in this motion is talking about changing the Standing Orders, because there are two elements of the Standing Orders that must be addressed. We feel, in light of the debate we have had about Bill C-23, basically changing the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act, that there are two elements of the Standing Orders being used quite often that should not be.

I will discuss those two elements right now. This is from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009, edited by O’Brien and Bosc. The two elements are time allocation and closure. One is used more often than the other, which of course would be time allocation. I will get to that in just a moment.

Let us talk about closure and how it is addressed in this publication. It says:

Closure is a procedural device used to bring debate on a question to a conclusion by “a majority decision of the House, even though all Members wishing to speak have not done so”. The closure rule provides the government with a procedure to prevent the further adjournment of debate on any matter and to require that the question be put at the end of the sitting in which a motion of closure is adopted. Apart from technical changes as to the hour at which debate is to conclude, the rule has remained virtually unchanged since its adoption in 1913.

I assume one of the reasons it has not been changed that much is that we do not use it as much as it was used before. It is time allocation that is used a lot more often. The text goes on:

Closure may be applied to any debatable matter, including bills and motions. The rule was conceived for use in a Committee of the Whole as much as in the House, but it cannot be applied to the business of its standing, special, legislative or joint committees.

That is closure. Let me get to what is more frequently used, which is time allocation. It seems to be used on every piece of legislation that we see fit to bring into the House these days. Certainly, from the standpoint of government legislation, time allocation is used quite frequently. In O’Brien and Bosc, it says:

The time allocation rule allows for specific lengths of time to be set aside for the consideration of one or more stages of a public bill. The term “time allocation” suggests primarily the idea of time management, but the government may use a motion to allocate time as a guillotine.

Business of Supply

I like how O'Brien and Bosc use the word "guillotine". In other words, it is just cut off at a certain point after so many speakers.

Usually, it is a form of limiting debate within the House. The original concept was to use it for timely matters and certain legislation that had to be passed very quickly. However, it is used so often now that it more for political expediency, dare I say it. It seems to be more toward that than anything else.

The text continues:

In fact, although the rule permits the government to negotiate with opposition parties on the adoption of a timetable for the consideration of a bill at one or more stages (including the consideration of Senate amendments), it also allows the government to impose strict limits on the time for debate. This is why time allocation is often confused with closure.

This is what I mentioned before. It continues:

While it has become the most frequently used mechanism for curtailing debate, time allocation remains a means of bringing the parties together to negotiate an acceptable distribution of the time of the House.

● (1040)

Notice here that this book refers to participation of all parties within this House. We do not see a lot of that these days. We see time allocation. We see some smaller discussions. I wish time allocation were used in a more responsible manner, but I do believe that unfortunately it has become an issue mostly of time allocation for political expediency.

The Standing Orders of the House of Commons and the Conflict of Interest Code do address this. Today we propose amending Standing Order 78 and Standing Order 57. We are considering, "Closure. Notice required. Time limit on speeches. All questions put...". Following Standing Order 57, we are proposing that the wording be:

, provided that the resolution of resolutions, clause or clauses, section or sections, preamble or preambles, title or titles, being considered do not pertain to any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.

We are also calling for the same under Standing Order 78. We are calling for a new subsection (4) saying:

(4) No motion, pursuant to any paragraph of this Standing Order, may be used to allocate a specified number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.

This is time allocation "that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act".

Let me go back to Bill C-23 for just a moment. We are making major amendments to the Elections Act for people voting in this country, which of course is enshrined within our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We want to talk about the fact that people have the inalienable right to vote and participate in our democracy. These are fundamental concepts.

In practice, since the conception of this House back in the 1800s, we have always looked and striven toward a consensus among all members of differing parties, of differing opinions, whether they be Conservative, Progressive Conservative, Liberal, NDP, CCF, Green Party, and so on. We have always looked for consensus in dealing with something as fundamental as this. Therefore, before the bill was tabled, there were always public consultations, yes, but also House consultations with the different constituents here or the different parties.

It has always been by convention, meaning that it has been a tradition to do that. Nothing has been codified to make sure the governing party of the day, whenever it has introduced legislation of this magnitude, would always seek out consultation with other parties. However, that did not happen this time.

That is why, on this particular day, the Liberal Party is proposing that, if we make amendments to something this consequential, some of this needs to be codified. If we are actually debating on second reading, third reading, or reports stage any changes to the Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act, time allocation and closure need not apply. It basically codifies a convention in this House, a tradition we should respect, which is to say that if we are making changes to the way Canadians express their opinions by the fundamental right of democracy, then it should be codified. I hope every member of this House will agree with us that closure and, specifically, time allocation would be set aside because of something of this importance.

I want to focus more on Bill C-23 because the pattern has been such that this has to be codified. It is unfortunate that we have to do this, really, if we think about it. There have been traditions in the past where the government, putting forward a motion regarding something as important as this, would get the leader of the official opposition to second the motion.

● (1045)

It seems as though more and more of these traditions of consensus within the House are going by the wayside. They are certainly disappearing. If we let more of this happen, the congenial way that this House deals with issues of such magnitude, those conventions and those traditions, will slowly disappear. There we find a degradation of debate in this House.

There are many things happening in this House that require focus to make sure that the sanctity of the debate is respected. I do not like the fact that when a bill is introduced in this House, someone stands up and says right away that our party or our group will disagree with it. I do not think that is respectful, because a full and robust debate was not allowed to happen, but we are observing this more and more.

I want to touch on Bill C-23, which is of course the bill that we are dealing with in the procedure and House affairs committee right now. Making changes to legislation such as the Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act, which is what is happening in Bill C-23, requires measures such as this. Unfortunately, time allocation was used after only the third speaker, and I was number three.

That was an unfortunate passage. There was not even an indication that debate was going to be prolonged or that it was going on far too long and that salient points were being repeated, which members have the right to do. The points were not being repeated to the point where the government was exacerbated and therefore had to use time allocation.

We had only three speakers. That was it. That was all. We had the mover, who was the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, and the critic from the official opposition, and me. Then, all of a sudden, down came the guillotine. The guillotine came down and debate was cut off, literally.

As we look at the background of Bill C-23, we see that there would be fundamental changes in the way Canadians exercise their vote. There are couple of these issues, and one is in regard to vouching. Vouching has been a tradition not only of this democracy but of other democracies as well. It is enshrined within the Elections Act. It is enshrined in how Elections Canada deals with people who do not have the appropriate identification on hand.

Here is the problem. People are eligible for that identification, but they do not have it on their person. They could be transient. They could have moved.

They can prove that they are above 18. They can prove that they are Canadian citizens. I can do that with my health card. I can produce it right now, or perhaps not. Nonetheless, it is here somewhere. My health card can prove that I am a Canadian citizen. I can produce ID that proves I am above the age of 18.

Here is the crux of the matter: proving residency has become problematic for a wide swath of our population. Half a million people use the system of vouching in order to vote. They may have had ID, but just did not have it on them, as in the case right now. I mean that literally.

As of right now, according to this legislation, I cannot vote. My driver's licence shows a post office box on as the address. I cannot use my voter information card anymore. That is what a lot of seniors use, incidentally, if I could pick out one sector of the population. I cannot use that anymore. My utility bills come electronically, so now I have to call my local power supplier and tell them to send me a paper bill. I think I have to pay \$4 for that.

● (1050)

There we see a fundamental change in the elections act. We have shortened debate because we want to ram this through very quickly, and that is unfortunate. That is why today I am hoping that all members, especially the Conservative backbenchers, will say this is the way to go. They should use their conscience here. If they are going to fundamentally change the system by eliminating vouching and disenfranchising up to half a million voters, I would suspect that many people here on the Conservative backbench would say we need debate.

Let us remember that time allocation took place after only three speakers. Therefore, the Conservative backbenchers were told they could not talk. They may have been brimming over with joy as they anticipated talking about how wonderful the government is, which many of them do on occasion. Such is their right. However, because of time allocation, they did not have the right to speak. That is unfortunate. I would hope that they would see that this particular motion today would satisfy them.

A member from southern Ontario had a bill about changing the way we function in the House. He tabled a private member's bill for democratic reform. He then faced a barrage of questions from all members of Parliament. What did he do? He took it back, changed it, and brought it back to the House.

There is a reason he did that. It was because there were fundamental changes that went beyond the scope and the principles of the bill that was tabled. If we vote yes at second reading, we have to accept the principles of the bill. One cannot go beyond the scope

Business of Supply

of the bill if one is looking for amendments within committee. That is called responsible law-making. That is called responsible debate. Unfortunately, we are in a position now where we have gone past second reading vote.

Let me get back to Bill C-23 once more. I talked about vouching and the fact that the office of the election commissioner, the investigative arm of Elections Canada, has now been moved from Elections Canada into the public prosecutions office.

The Conservatives keep talking about the independence of the elections commissioner and how fundamental it is. There is nothing wrong with achieving independence for an elections commissioner in order to do due diligence and do the job. However, here is the problem. They said they want to put the referee's jersey back on the elections commissioner by putting him in the prosecution office. That way he would get to be the referee that he was meant to be. They may have put the referee's jersey on the commissioner, but they took away his whistle. He does not have a whistle to blow in case of serious infractions.

That is a key investigative tool. Many elections commissioners in certain provinces across the country have this tool. Many other departments federally, such as the Competition Bureau, have this power, and they move it frequently. They told us in committee that they use it quite often. It is obvious, without saying, that it is an essential tool. The tool can compel testimony.

In the case of the robocalls, thousands of names were just introduced to the House to talk about robocalls and how bad it was. There are not enough answers regarding this situation. That is unfortunate. Having the right tools to investigate is the way to go, but unfortunately the government did not see fit to do that. Now what we have was not an exercise in independence for the commissioner but an exercise in isolation to isolate the investigative arm of Elections Canada.

Finally, I hope through the course of the day and in the vote that will follow in a fortnight, we will say that debate on fundamental changes to the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act should not be limited.

● (1055)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for introducing this topic, because it has taken over Parliament and much of the media in Canada. It is a subject of great interest to many people.

What do we have here? I have tried to figure out why the Conservatives are behaving in the fashion they do. It goes back to what I was told years ago about their philosophy, the Straussian philosophy, the philosophy that the elite is right. The idea is that they are the elite, so they are right. It does not matter whether they lie, cheat, or do anything else to misinform the population, because they are right, they know they are right, and they are doing the right thing for people because they are the elite. This is their philosophy. This is the philosophy of the Conservative Party right now. This is what they are doing. This is why they continue to act in this fashion on so many issues.

Business of Supply

This is why we have the spectacle of a minister who has no clothes, other than his own party, to back him up. He is walking naked in terms of support from the public, experts, and intellectuals about what he is doing with this legislation, yet he has the nerve to stand over and over again, clad in so very little and so exposed to our slings and arrows. The only solution to this is an election.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, public nudity notwithstanding, I appreciate the comments from my hon. colleague.

It is funny that he mentioned elites. I have never thought of that word before, but I think he has touched on something that rings true, because if we look at it, we see it is not only the advantaged but those who are established who are going to have the advantage.

Such would be the case when members call their prior donors and it would not be an election expense anymore. This would be a fundamental way of maintaining an advantage in a Canadian election for those who are established. I say that as a member of one of the established parties. It is somewhat ironic, is it not, because this probably would not have happened if it was 2003 or 2004, when the Conservatives took over another party, the Progressive Conservatives. That is my political opinion.

In this particular case the member is right, because the people who are already in those spots would now be advantaged by some of this legislation, especially when it comes to vouching. Again, this is an exercise in isolation. It is also an exercise in maintaining an advantage of incumbency in this particular case.

• (1100)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments and for his motion today. It makes entire sense. There is absolutely no reason that any bill or policy being implemented in the House of Commons by government should not have full and free debate, not only by parliamentarians but by all members of the public. In that way, we are able to achieve what is always better policy in the interests of Canadians.

What is being proposed with regard to the fair elections act would disenfranchise many of the people I represent in my riding. I am sure this is not reserved just for members of the opposition parties in the House of Commons. I am sure it would affect members of governing parties. I would like to ask my colleague what the impact of passing such a piece of legislation would be on his riding in particular, and how it would impact individuals when it comes to having the opportunity to vote in a democracy.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Labrador and I share a common situation when it comes to elections, and that is in regard to seniors and seniors' residences. Remember, a lot of seniors still use and bank on getting in the mail that voter information card for their piece of identification for residency. Many of them do not have a driver's licence, which is the ultimate hammer when it comes to identification, because it has the address, and of course, it is recognized identification. Other than that, they have a health card. The minister even said a health bracelet, for that matter. I do not know how many bracelets have an address on them, but very few. They may identify people, but again, as one person put it in committee last night, people need one or two pieces of ID to get the rest.

The minister talks about 39 pieces of ID. If people do not have the fundamental few, then they are not going to get the others. There are so many people disadvantaged, seniors being one group. They keep saying that they need this attestation. I do not know if they have ever tried to seek an attestation, but it is not as easy as it sounds.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor for bringing forward this motion.

I am curious. This motion on closure and time allocation the member is raising in regard to the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act we certainly support, but the problem has been far more widespread than that. As members know, we have seen omnibus budget implementation that has gutted our environmental assessments and has destroyed the independent ability of the National Energy Board to make independent decisions without being overruled by cabinet decree. We have seen huge bricks brought forward. Even though we are going to spend the whole day on this motion, and we are supporting it, I do not understand why the motion is limited to just two bills.

There is the Official Languages Act, the Canada Health Act, and a whole range of other legislation. There is the continual abuse of Parliament that takes place through the current government's omnibus budget bills. I do not understand why none of that is in the Liberal motion.

Could the member clarify why, when they have the whole day, and certainly we are supportive of putting a close to the abusive nature of time allocation and closure, the Liberal Party is limiting the motion to just two bills?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, in light of the situation of Bill C-23, they have spent a lot of time discussing this bill. We should focus. Maybe the member would like to look at the motion itself and focus on these particular acts and what is happening here today. The key here today is to focus.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add, if I may, to the response by my colleague to the House Leader of the Official Opposition as to why the motion would focus on these two particular bills. It is because the Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act are fundamental to our democracy. If we are going to have a functioning democracy, we need certain constructs. Parliament is essential to that, and so is the Elections Act. If those two bills can be amended by imposing time allocation and forcing things without due process and due debate, and without the ability of Canadians to become aware of the importance of whatever legislation Parliament is confronted with by the executive, they can undermine democratic principles, the democratic process, and democratic institutions.

Therefore, the reason for the focus is quite obvious. These two acts are of great significance in terms of protecting and enabling checks and balances in our country to provide a free and transparent expression of democracy. If we start tampering with those in a manner that is not appropriate, then indeed, we are facing a situation that we should not be facing. That is why the focus is on these two today.

Business of Supply

●(1105)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier, who put it very well. These are two fundamental principles that are enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is what these acts pertain to. Section 3 talks about our inalienable right to vote. That is why we want to focus on this today.

The members from the NDP have said that they are going to support this. I do not know if they are speaking on behalf of everyone. We are also asking for the backbenchers of the Conservative Party to call for this. I am making an assumption that the front bench is not going to vote for it, but maybe I should not do that, in light of what I have said in debate. I hope the Conservatives feel that this is a fundamental opinion we are putting forward in the House, which is that we cannot limit debate on two fundamental acts so crucial to our democracy: the Parliament of Canada Act and the Elections Act.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to speak against the motion moved by my opposition colleague. Essentially, the motion put forward today would prevent the government from using time allocation or closure on any bill amending the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.

Before getting into the substance of today's opposition day motion, I just want to comment on how remarkable the choice of the Liberals is for today's debate. The top priority of Canadians is our economy. Canadians expect us to be here working on ways to keep our economic recovery going. Meanwhile, the Liberals have two days this spring when they get to pick their topic of discussion. Did they offer up an economic proposal or any economic idea? Absolutely not. Then again, maybe that is not surprising, since the Liberal leader thinks that our budget will balance itself, and he is still working on a definition of just who is in the middle class.

Let us come back to today's debate. I respect the intent of the hon. member's motion. Bills amending the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act are of particular interest to members, as they concern the very functioning of our democracy. It is understandable that many members would wish to speak to such bills. However, the motion is not necessary. If we respect Parliament and trust the traditions permitted to authorities of Parliament, we need not selectively limit them in this way.

In my speech today I will demonstrate how the rules of this House already provide an appropriate balance between the needs of the government of the day and the needs of the opposition. There is no need to further limit the government's flexibility to ensure that debates conclude and that decisions are taken on issues relating to Parliament and elections.

It would be helpful for hon. members to remember more generally why we have provisions in our rules for time allocation and closure in the first place. Before I do that, let me quickly review what exactly time allocation and closure entail.

Time allocation and closure are tools under the Standing Orders that allow the government to curtail debate on an item. The rules for time allocation are outlined in Standing Order 78. Essentially, they allow a minister of the crown to propose a motion to allot a specified

number of days or hours to the proceedings on the stage of a bill. The Standing Orders differentiate between three scenarios and provide escalating restrictions on the government, depending on the level of agreement the government is able to secure from opposition parties.

First, when there is agreement among all the parties, a minister may propose a time allocation motion covering any or all stages of a bill. The Liberal motion would even block agreements among all three parties from being implemented.

Second, when there is agreement among a majority but not of all the parties, the minister's motion can only cover one stage in the legislative process, although the motion can apply to both report stage and third reading. The motion can be moved without notice.

Third, if there is no agreement with the other parties, the government can propose a time allocation motion unilaterally. In this case, the motion can cover only one stage of the legislative process. The amount of time allocated for that stage may not be less than one sitting day, and previous notice of the intent to move the motion is required.

The rules for closure are outlined in Standing Order 57. They allow the government to move a motion to prevent the adjournment of debate on any matter and to require a vote on the matter at the end of the sitting if the closure motion is adopted.

What is the purpose of time allocation and closure? Why do these rules exist in the first place?

In our system of government, it is important to balance the needs of the government and the needs of the opposition. Our rules of debate ensure an opportunity for the voices of members to be heard and for the opposition to do just that: express opposition to the government. However, so too must the rules allow the executive to have a legitimate expectation to govern.

Time in the House is precious and must be used carefully. The government must ensure that decisions see debate but not paralysis. We cannot and will not allow our system of government to fall prey to the legislative gridlock that can occur in other countries. Our ability to deal with global economic turbulence and other challenges facing our country relate to our ability to effectively and efficiently manage and allocate time in our House. Canadians expect no less of us. Canadians expect results from their legislature. They expect members to work hard and get things done on their behalf. We agree.

●(1110)

The government has been clear that it will ensure a productive, hard-working, and orderly Parliament that achieves those results. Timetabling bills is a way to organize government business while allowing a reasonable opportunity for voices to be heard.

Business of Supply

However, there must be limits. Without time allocation and closure rules, we can theoretically have a situation where the opposition uses obstructionist and dilatory tactics to prevent a government bill from going to a vote.

O'Brien and Bosc state, on page 647:

One of the fundamental principles of parliamentary procedure is that debate in the House of Commons must lead to a decision within a reasonable period of time.

There are checks and balances built into our rules to ensure that matters enjoy a reasonable period of debate, but at a certain point, debate must end and a vote held to bring matters to a close.

I have outlined why time allocation exists. I now wish to highlight a few examples of time allocation.

First, I will highlight how time allocation is built into the Standing Orders governing debate on certain other items. Then I will provide some examples of time allocation being used on bills to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act.

Let us consider the Standing Orders that govern debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, the budget, and private members' business.

Under our rules, all of these debates are timetabled.

Standing Order 50(1) provides for a maximum of six days' debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne and any amendments proposed thereto.

Standing Order 84(2) provides for a maximum of four sitting days of debate on the budget motion and any amendments proposed thereto.

Finally, the Standing Orders governing private members' business contain several provisions for the timetabling of these items. These include Standing Order 93(1)(a), which provides that there be no more than two hours of debate on the second reading motion for an item of private members' business; and Standing Order 98(2), which provides for report and third reading stage to be taken up on two separate sitting days.

If timetabling is appropriate for issues of such fundamental importance as the government's budgetary policy and items of concern to constituents brought forward by individual members, it is hard to imagine why my hon. colleague thinks it is not appropriate for bills concerning Parliament and elections.

There are other examples in our Standing Orders of rules that ensure the orderly and timely conduct of business in this House.

Standing Order 66(2) provides for no more than three hours of debate on a motion to concur in a committee report.

Standing Order 38(1) provides that adjournment proceedings last no more than 30 minutes.

I would also argue that the provisions of Standing Order 76.1(5), which provides the Speaker with the power to group report stage motions for debate, are a type of timetabling. The intent behind this rule is to attempt to avoid a repetition of the committee stage of a bill or other dilatory tactics.

However, the supreme irony is that today's debate is itself time allocated. Under the Standing Orders, the Speaker will stand at 5:15 p.m. to interrupt the debate and put the motion to the House.

There are a number of other provisions of the Standing Orders that reflect the need to ensure that timely decisions are taken on matters brought before this House.

I will now turn to some specific examples of bills amending the Parliament of Canada Act and the Canada Elections Act and how such bills have been, or in the case of my first example, will be timetabled.

My hon. colleague, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, recently introduced Bill C-586, the reform act, 2014. The member was added to the order of precedence when it was replenished last evening.

Bill C-586 would amend both the Parliament of Canada Act and the Canada Elections Act. As a private member's bill, it would be subject to time allocation under our Standing Orders, with no more than two hours of debate on the second reading and no more than two hours of debate on the report and third reading stages of that bill.

Is it fair to timetable a private member's bill amending the Parliament of Canada Act and the Canada Elections Act while denying the government the same opportunity with a government bill amending the same acts? In other words, is it fair for the rules of this place to allow a private member's bill on a certain subject to come to a vote, while potentially preventing a timely decision on a government bill on a similar subject?

I think at this time it would be prudent to point out to the House that my hon. colleagues from the opposite side of the House are trying to prevent a practice that they themselves have used in the past.

• (1115)

On June 10, 2003, a former Liberal government, lo and behold, moved a time allocation motion stipulating that no more than one further sitting day, just one, be allotted for consideration at report stage, and no more than one further sitting day be allotted for consideration at third reading, of Bill C-24. What was Bill C-24? Well, Bill C-24 amended the Canada Elections Act with respect to political financing.

Another example is found on February 22, 2000, when that same Chrétien Liberal government used time allocation on Bill C-2. Bill C-2 was the Canada Elections Act itself.

Maybe the Liberals think that replacing the Canada Elections Act should actually be exempt from a law that simply amends it. What is more, Bill C-2 was referred to committee before second reading. Debates for that procedure back then were capped at three hours. So, yes, those very same Liberals thought that a whole new elections law needed just 180 minutes of discussion in the chamber before getting sent off to committee.

Time allocation on an elections bill was considered to be appropriate back then. It is unclear to me what has changed since then.

Business of Supply

There is no doubt that bills amending the Parliament of Canada Act or the Canada Elections Act are of particular importance to this place. So let us consider what would happen if this motion were adopted at some future time when the government brought forward an urgent bill amending these acts.

If this motion were to be adopted, the government of the day would have only one recourse to ensure that a timely decision were taken on such a bill, and that is through unanimous consent. Even if all the parties were in agreement, it would only take one member to deny that consent. The government must have the flexibility to timetable important legislative initiatives and bring things to a vote, especially bills concerning elections and the functioning of this legislature.

At its heart, time allocation is an effective scheduling and time-management tool. That is why I cannot support this motion.

In conclusion, time allocation and closure are necessary tools for the government under the Standing Orders. The government must be free to organize its business and to ensure that decisions are taken no matter the subject matter of the issue at hand.

Timetabling debate provides an appropriate balance between the opposition's right to be heard and the government's right to govern. Perhaps opposition members will vote against certain items of government business, and it is certainly their right to do so, but we must ensure that we get to the point where a vote is held and decisions are taken. Canadians expect no less. That is why I urge my hon. colleagues to vote against this motion.

• (1120)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that presentation, but I find it absurd in some ways.

The member has tied together time allocation with the Speech from the Throne, which does not change a single bit of legislation in Canada. He has tied this together with the budget address, which does not change a single bit of legislation in Canada. However, this legislation today actually does something to the legislation of the House.

It is patently absurd to think that time allocation for things done every year by a government, such as a budget address or a Speech from the Throne, is tied to changes in the electoral laws governing how we operate our democracy. There is outstanding confusion created by that.

I think it can be pretty clear to everyone that the rules of Parliament are set up so that the budget implementation bill, which actually does change legislation, is not subject to any time allocation under law. It is only done through the purview of the government of the day.

Does my colleague not agree that you are not talking about the same type of issues when you bring up the Speech from the Throne and the budget—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Western Arctic knows to address his comments and questions to the Chair and not to the member opposite.

The hon. member for Oxford.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to hear the speech by the member for Western Arctic.

What we are talking about here is time allocation in a variety of different ways obviously. We made points about where time allocation is used in a variety of instances. I would just point out that I spoke about private members' business being time allocated by the Standing Orders.

My friend may not know this, but the member for Compton—Stanstead had a private member's bill to amend the Constitution. If he thinks that is not important, I do not know what is. That was time allocated due to the fact that it was private members' business.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I generally do agree that the House, in order to function, needs to have some time allocation, some time constructs of some sort. However, the one example that our colleague across the way gave, which I am a little surprised he used, is reference to a committee of a bill before second reading. After five hours the bill is then referred to a committee.

I brought this up a number of times, that the government has never referred a bill to committee before second reading. That is a way of showing respect for committees, because doing so allow the committee to address the bill and even expand the scope of the bill, as opposed to having to restrict itself after it has been adopted at second reading.

Why the member would use that as an example is beyond me. The government has never used a reference to committee before second reading of any bill. I wonder why it has not.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I do believe that my colleague was a member of the Liberal government in 2003, when the Liberal government used time allocation to get its bill for a massive overhaul of political financing through Parliament.

I do not know what was wrong with it then and what is wrong with it now. Somehow there is a loss in credibility, if the member supported it in 2003 but not now. It is something that has been used in the past, and there is no reason why it should not continue to be used today.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has stated that it is just used to further the government agenda.

We had a 350-page budget implementation bill with 500 clauses amending more than 40 laws in Canada, and the government brought in time allocation after 25 minutes of debate.

How would the member's constituents react if they knew that that 350-page omnibus bill, amending 40 different laws, was invoked with time allocation and closure after 25 minutes of debate?

• (1125)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Oxford have been more than disappointed in that member and his filibustering in both the House and committee, resulting in absolutely nothing other than his talking and getting his remarks in the blues.

Business of Supply

I do not understand the member's whole issue about filibustering the House and why we need to move items through the House by using the process and the Standing Orders. He was filibustering earlier today to block my colleagues' motion in the Liberal Party.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the member for Oxford that I was not a member of the government in that particular circumstance. I was a member of the governing party but not of the government.

I would like the member to know, and he could check my voting record, that at times I have voted against my own government on time allocation when I figured it was not appropriate.

I have supported the government when it becomes apparent that a dilatory tactic is being used to prevent our getting to a decision. I do believe that the House, at some point, has to get to a decision within reasonable timeframes—however, not after three speakers and only a few minutes.

That is why the House is now forced to consider the motion that we have before us today. Indeed, we have had time allocation imposed much too rapidly, without any sense that the opposing parties were trying to prevent the House getting to a decision down the road.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I apologize to my colleague across the floor if I wrongly gave him credit for being part of the government in those days.

Equally, I do appreciate that the member does agree with time allocation.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first say that it is amazing that the efforts and hard work of my friend from Burnaby—New Westminster have reached his constituents. It goes to show that a dedicated MP like my friend can actually affect and move Canadians from all walks of life.

As the member sits on what we refer to as the “backbench” of the government, his responsibility is not unlike the responsibility of members of the opposition. In the design of Parliament, the way this place has been built, his job, like our job, is to hold the government to account. Yet time and again, when the cabinet has moved time allocation restricting his and his colleagues' ability to debate legislation and to hold government to account, he has been in support of, in effect, himself being muzzled and his own powers as a parliamentarian to do his job being limited.

What the Conservatives have attempted to do is to normalize this abuse of power. They have said this is just a general recourse and my friend across the way has bought into it. He says it is fine to limit not only his ability but all MPs' abilities to do their jobs, which is to scrutinize legislation, budgets, and whatnot. The Conservative backbench says they support that limitation. I find it odd for a group whose roots lie in the Reform movement aimed at renewing and increasing the accountability of Parliament to now have morphed suddenly into a party that is just so happy and pliant, that is, ready to adhere to whatever the Prime Minister's Office happens to say and want. It is unfortunate, but it seems to be a reality for him and his colleagues.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, that again is another speech by the NDP as opposed to asking questions in debate.

I have lots of opportunity to speak, and what I would really appreciate is if the members opposite would understand that the business of the House is important. It is important to move these things through.

We are looking for jobs in this country. People want to the opportunity to work. What do New Democrats want to do? They want to filibuster at committees and in the House. It is about the economy, jobs, and people. That is why the people in my riding see the foolishness of the filibusters by the members opposite.

•(1130)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be splitting my time today with the opposition House leader, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster. He has done an incredible job of standing up to the government in the short time he has been in the position, holding them to account and pushing back on what has been a continual and constant abuse of Parliament and our democratic and fundamental principles which we all share as Canadians. I believe that Conservatives share them as well, when they are able to unleash themselves for that split second and realize what their jobs are meant to be here.

We see a motion today that we welcome from the Liberal Party, although we find it passing strange, on two fronts. We welcome the opportunity to talk about free and fair debate in Canada's Parliament, to talk about the abuses that the Conservatives have unleashed more than 55 times on Canada's Parliament.

There are two considerations and concerns that we have with what the Liberals have put forward. I am sure my hon. colleague the opposition House leader will elaborate on these, so I will pass over them briefly. The first issue is that the motion as it is presented today is too limited. It only seeks to curtail the government's power to use time allocation and the extraordinary power of shutting down debate in too narrow a way. We would seek to perhaps expand it, and my friend from Burnaby—New Westminster will elaborate on that.

The second piece is that this may be a new-found love for accountability and transparency from the Liberal Party. As we have seen, when it held the same position as the Conservatives currently do, it too used this same extraordinary power.

Canadians can tolerate a lot from their political representatives, and we know that we ask them to do that. They tolerate the various assortment of scandals and unfortunate choices, and the bad choices, made by the current government. However, they will not tolerate hypocrisy. They do not appreciate hypocrisy from any party, in this case, the Liberals, who used time allocation on certain bills that it should never have been used on.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it was you, in 2011, who moved a motion to limit the powers of shutting down debate by the government, which was rejected. It was the NDP who also sought most recently to give increased powers to the Speaker. That was to discern between when the government was using time allocation as it was designed, for when a debate has gone extensively beyond what would be considered a normal parameter for discussion, and limiting it to that instance rather than what we see from the government.

As my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster said, it was on a massive omnibus bill, or ominous bill as some people call them now. They are Trojan Horse bills. We have seen Bills C-38 and C-45, and the most recent budget implementation act, Bill C-31, that are incredibly expansive in their nature. They are hundreds of pages long, and in this case affects more than 40 Canadian laws. It would change 40 Canadian laws in this one case.

The extent of these massive bills would be enough that most people would consider a full and extensive debate to be proper. However, after a short 25 minutes, the Conservatives said that is enough. They said that we need to shut down the debate on this most recent ominous bill; we need to shut off any conversation about all of these laws that are being affected.

When we look through the debates of the past when the Liberals used the same tactics that the Conservatives are using, it is passing strange that it was the Conservatives, who were then in opposition, who had so many problems with that abuse of power.

Let me read one quote. This is one of my favourites. It is good. It is someone being prescient and intelligent, and doing their job as a parliamentarian. Let me quote the following from a debate on November 26, 1996, which took place right here:

In my view, the procedure of using time allocation for electoral law, doing it quickly and without the consent of the other political parties, is the kind of dangerous application of electoral practices that we are more likely to find in third world countries.

Who would say something like that? Who would say that the abuse of power that the Liberal government of the day was using to shut down debate on changing our electoral laws was representative of something “that we are more likely to find in third world countries”? It was the current Prime Minister who said that. It is true.

The current Prime Minister, when he was in opposition, was faced with a Liberal majority that was unilaterally changing electoral laws—not nearly as extensively as the Conservatives are now doing, by the way—and sought to shut down debate in the House of Commons, having achieved no consensus or agreement from the other opposition parties. It was the current Prime Minister who said that this was an abuse of power; this was wrong.

• (1135)

Lo and behold, we now have Bill C-23, the unfair elections act, which the Conservatives have designed in its very DNA to be unfair, to be undemocratic, and to allow an advantage to Conservative candidates in the next election rather than winning fairly. They have put that into their election bill with no agreement from any other political party.

Then, to add insult to that abuse, to that injury, they have shut down debate prematurely and rushed it to committee. They are now in the Senate doing the same thing—the unaccountable, unelected Senate that this same Prime Minister appointed. The hypocrisies and irony in this instance are so rich that they approach the level of appalling.

To my Liberal friends, I hope this new found love of democratic principles is sincere and will be sustained, regardless of which side of the House they are sitting on. New Democrats have a long and proud record of standing up against the abuses of time allocation, of

Business of Supply

shutting down debate, of allowing members to freely express themselves on behalf of constituents. That is what we are here for. It is not to advance one political party or the other. The very structure of the House of Commons is simple, yet beautiful in its nature: to hold the government of the day to account.

As I said to my Conservative colleague across the way, that is a responsibility, not only of the opposition parties but of those who sit in the so-called government backbenches. That is their job. Unchecked power eventually becomes corrupted, as we saw from the Conservatives as soon as they gained their majority.

It was a very slight majority. If we look at the design and the build of the seats in the House of Commons, it is what we call the rump, the little section of extra flow over the Conservative seats in the corner that we see during voting time. It is called the rump, by all parties; I do not mean to pass any judgment on the quality of those members. However, it is that tiny group over there who represent the majority that the government has, having achieved just 38% of the vote in the last election. When we break it down, it was only 25% of all eligible voters in the country, and they ended up with 100% of the power.

What do the Conservatives do with that power? Do they act responsibly? Heavens, no. They introduce these massive omnibus bills and then slap on time allocation, shutting down debate on legislation that is so incredibly complex that nobody on the government benches actually understands what they are voting for. That is a shame.

[*Translation*]

This motion is about a democratic principle that is essential for Parliament to work properly for Canadians. I fully understand that Canadians are quite cynical about the current state of our politics, and for good reason. It is only natural, what with this corrupt, anti-democratic, and by all accounts very weak government. What is more, this government is short on ideas. The budget implementation bill is short on tools for rebuilding our economy.

There is a shortfall of some 300,000 jobs in the industrial sector and for young Canadians who are still trying to find work. They are coping with an unemployment rate that is twice that of the rest of Canada. What are we seeing in the government? We are seeing an extremely corrupt system, a shortage of ideas, and a problem, namely that of disliking democracy.

[*English*]

What is that terrible expression that I have seen in a comic strip somewhere: “that the beatings will continue until morale improves”. The Conservatives heap abuse upon abuse on Parliament and ask why it is that the opposition parties are so resistant to their mandate and to their practices?

Business of Supply

•(1140)

Well, with what we have seen, time and time again, whether it is the unfair elections act, these massive omnibus bills, the way it approaches trade negotiations with other countries, or the general approach that the government has to democracy, I look back, almost fondly, to those days of the Reform Party. It seemed to at least have stood for something. I did not agree with it, but it seemed to have stood for something. Now we see what these guys have become. Power seems to have corrupted them and left them without those principles. It is a shame.

We will be supporting the motion. I look forward to the continued debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his presentation. I am always immensely pleased to listen to his eloquent oratory in the House. I thank him for that.

The motion deals with a fundamental aspect of our democracy. It has to do with a constitutional right, the right to vote. It is important to consider the motion. As we have said, we support the motion. I do not know whether my colleague is as mystified by this as I am. The motion is rather limited in terms of what it seeks to do, especially with regard to the Canada Elections Act.

Can my colleague comment on the fact that other statutes are just as important, for example the Official Languages Act, which has a quasi-constitutional status, and the Supreme Court Act? The list goes on. I wonder whether my colleague can also say a few words about the fact that the motion has such a limited scope.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my dear colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

It is incredible that at this point in Canadian history we have a government that does not like the Constitution. There is a lot of proof, not just the last omnibus bill, which proposes to change the Supreme Court Act. What happened? The appointment of Mr. Nadon was rejected outright by the Supreme Court. That was very costly, but what does that matter to a government that rejects the Constitution, human rights in Canada and aboriginal rights? It is constitutional law. There is another Conservative omnibus bill that deals with the pipeline. They are using the same tactic. They are against all environmental protection measures. They are against the voice of the people. They are against aboriginal rights. They have tried to destroy all that. In my opinion, this is an unbelievable point in our history. The government is so against the Constitution that it is constantly making serious mistakes. I find that incredible. It is not a Canadian tactic and it is not a government action that shows Canada in its best light.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that elections and election legislation must serve the people. Parliament must serve the people. If the laws concerning these two institutions of Canadian democracy are changed, Canadians must have a voice in their MP.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I do not understand the question completely.

I will quote the Prime Minister in responding.

•(1145)

[*English*]

At one point, the Prime Minister said:

When the bill was rammed through the House with closure, it really did not present a lot of opportunity for meaningful public debate. We have begun to hear, and the Senate...heard, from provincial and territorial governments...academics...all of whom were condemning...[this bill] as not simply a bad bill...undemocratic...but unconstitutional....

The interests of all of Canadians must be served, not the interests of politicians, not partisan interests or political self-interests.

Those were the words of the Prime Minister when he used to hold those principles, I believe, because he said them here in the House of Commons, the theatre, the place, the church of our democratic values. He used to say and, I think, believe these things.

The great tragedy for the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party is that they have become so obsessed and beholden to their pursuit of power that they have lost their way. It is a tragedy.

However, we will defend the constitutional merits of this country, the democratic values of the House of Commons, because that is what we were elected to do as New Democrats. We will continue to do that despite the overwhelming abuse of those powers from this majority government.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope to match the eloquence of my friend and colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. I will start by repeating what the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley said: We will be supporting this motion.

Certainly we welcome the Liberal Party to the issue of the unfair elections act. The Liberal Party has been strongly criticized in civil society groups and community organizations across the country for not having been on this file at all. It is important that the Liberals are now getting involved in what is a pretty fundamental issue.

There is no doubt that what is happening on the unfair elections act is a travesty. We are seeing this every day in the House of Commons. The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Outremont, has time after time raised questions about how the Conservative government has approached trying to ram through these changes through the unfair elections act. Members saw yesterday in the House of Commons the Prime Minister refusing to answer those questions, simply sitting in his chair. That shows a profound lack of responsibility.

Business of Supply

Now this has blown up. We have heard from very learned Canadians such as Sheila Fraser who is undoubtedly a Canadian hero. She is a person whom every Canadian stands behind because of her past history of exposing the deplorable Liberal sponsorship scandal. Her name was evoked all the time by Conservatives when she was exposing what was widespread and profound Liberal corruption. She has spoken out and said this is an attack on democracy. The Prime Minister is not even willing to stand in the House and answer questions. His minister is not even willing to evoke the name of Sheila Fraser, to mention her name, and instead condemns her and tries to attack both her and the Chief Electoral Officer.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the travesty of the unfair elections act, now spreading across the country, is something that needs to be dealt with. We need to shut down the attempts by the government to railroad or bulldoze through the bad legislation that would simply allow the Conservatives to try to steal the next election. There is no doubt about that.

That is why we support the principle of the motion overall, though it is so very limiting. It is my concern that we see with the Liberals, unfortunately, an alliance developing with the Conservative government. We have seen it on their use of Standing Order 56.1, which is a very punitive measure. In the 10 years I have been in this House of Commons, there has traditionally been support by all members of the opposition to stop the abusive use of Standing Order 56.1, and yet the Liberals have joined with the Conservatives in that kind of abuse.

We see that as well in the Bureau of Internal Economy. We believe, on this side of the House, that the Bureau of Internal Economy's secretive and partisan decisions are simply not appropriate for a modern democracy. We believe the BOIE should be done away with, and MPs' expenses should be handled independently and impartially. We have also raised the fact that we believe the Auditor General should be monitoring MPs' expenses. Yet we have seen, from the Conservatives and Liberals, systematic blocking of those attempts for real reform that would allow the Auditor General to be brought in.

I am a bit skeptical, because of what we have unfortunately seen from this alliance between Liberals and Conservatives, about the real intent to modify what is undoubtedly an abuse of Parliament. The use of time allocation and closure has been invoked more than 60 times by the current Conservative government. It has often been used to bulldoze and ram through bad legislation, certainly legislation that is not in Canadians' interest, more than 60 times.

I cited just a few minutes ago a 350-page budget implementation bill, and after 25 minutes of debate—the first speaker had not even finished—the government had already given notice of time allocation and closure. That was after 25 minutes, and we are talking about a 350-page bill with more than 500 articles modifying 40 laws.

• (1150)

Every single Conservative said, “That is okay. I do not want to speak up on behalf of my constituents. I do not want to modify this legislation. I do not want my voice, whether it be from Oxford or any other riding, heard. I do not want to speak out on behalf of my

constituents. I just want to be silent. I want to vote the way the Prime Minister's Office tells me to vote”.

That is not the principle of representative democracy. That is not the principle of why Canadians send us here. New Democratic Party MPs, the official opposition, take our jobs seriously. We want to scrutinize legislation. That is why these time allocation measures and closure measures are so bad for the Canadian public.

It is because it shuts down the ability of Canadian members of Parliament to do their job. We have seen the result in the last few weeks with two laws that have been rejected by the Supreme Court because they were badly botched by the Conservative government.

Time allocation and, indeed, closure motions do not allow for that proper scrutiny. The government has to then come back in with amendments and change the laws, because it did not do them properly in the first place.

Our opposition to time allocation and our opposition to closure motions is not just based on the theory that it is important for members of Parliament to speak out on important legislation. I include, as the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley said, members on the government side, dozens of whom have never spoken in this parliamentary session on a single government bill.

They have abdicated their responsibility to speak out. They never speak out on government legislation, and I am sure the voters, come October 19, 2015, will remember that these members have never risen in the House to speak on government legislation, either for or against or to modify.

That is clearly an abuse of Parliament, and I think it is an abuse of the voters.

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives have used time allocation more than 60 times, but the Liberal Party was worse when it was in power. It used time allocation 75 times. That is appalling. It shows that the Conservatives and Liberals want the same things, which is why Canadians are so impatient to see the kind of change an NDP government would bring in 2015. That is when we will have some real debates in the House.

Even though the Liberals' motion has to do with electoral “deform”, it does not address all of the other bills that need to be addressed. The Official Languages Act, the Supreme Court Act, the Canada Health Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act are all fundamental laws. However, the Liberals seem to approve of the government's use of time allocation.

Mr. Speaker, you yourself moved a motion on November 23, 2011, calling for time allocation motions be moved in collaboration with the Speaker of the House. The government must defend its use of time allocation and present appropriate justifications for a time allocation motion to be adopted in the House of Commons.

This would enable members to speak and would also ensure that we avoid the kinds of mistakes this government has made since it came to power. It has introduced bills that do not work and that have been struck down by the Supreme Court. These bills should be subject to a serious verification process to ensure that they are valid.

Business of Supply

We moved this motion in 2011 in your name, Mr. Speaker, and we still stand by the principle of holding debates in the House. If the government wants to move a time allocation motion, it must provide a justification and get the consent of the House of Commons. That is an important change. The Liberal motion is just more of the same and does not propose any real change.

The real change will come in 2015, when we can have a government that respects parliamentary and democratic rights.

• (1155)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague said that many Conservative members have never given speeches in the House on a single government bill. I wonder why that is.

Is it possible that it is not because they are afraid of speaking in the House, but rather because they are afraid of answering questions? [English]

If I had to answer for some of the things that the current Conservative government has done—and there are some good things, but there are a lot of bad things—or answer for a piece of government legislation, I would be embarrassed. I would feel that I might embarrass my family if I had to answer questions. Maybe that is why so many Conservative members have not stood up to give speeches on government bills.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kingston and the Islands for his question, and I think the best person to cite is a former Conservative, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

After the member left the Conservative caucus, which I thought showed real courage as the one Conservative member who stood up for rights and democracy, he said, “I fear that we have morphed into what we once mocked.”

The member for Edmonton—St. Albert was absolutely right.

I can recall when my riding was represented by a Reform member who would send us information saying that the party was going to speak out on constituents' behalf and fight for their constituents in Parliament. Under the current Conservative government, that no longer happens. Backbenchers simply vote however the PMO boys tell them to vote. They just follow that line.

However, what is most reprehensible is that they have even sold out their own ridings by refusing to speak on government legislation and themselves shutting down their own ability to speak on behalf of their constituents. Shame on them.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Burnaby—New Westminster for his very eloquent speech and for his fierce opposition to the government's time allocation motions. I thank him for speaking up on this issue today.

It is a shocking fact that the Conservatives have used time allocation and closure more than 60 times in this House since their election. Certainly that is what the motion we are speaking to is hoping to avoid.

However, can the member comment on why our Liberal colleagues would raise this issue when in fact Liberal governments

have the same record of invoking time allocation on electoral bills? In fact, they invoked time allocation dozens and dozens of times when they were in government. It does not seem to make sense.

• (1200)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Parkdale—High Park for her question. She is one of the most eloquent and experienced members of Parliament in the House of Commons. I appreciate her raising a question on this issue, because I know she has a very substantive knowledge of the importance of the work of a parliamentarian.

The point the member raises is absolutely valid. It is hard to determine which party is worse. The Conservatives have used time allocation and closure over 60 times and the Liberals have done it over 75 times, so we have the Conservatives racing the former bad, corrupt Liberal government to the bottom. They are trying to decide who can be worse in terms of abusing Parliament.

Of course, when we look at the Liberal record of badly botched legislation and the Conservative record of legislation that is being rejected by the Supreme Court, again we see that race to the bottom. Both parties seem to be willing to sell out their voters to a remarkable extent.

The reality is that if people want a strong, hard-working MP who speaks out for them and their riding, in the next election people should be voting New Democrat.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by making a point about the importance of the legitimacy of government. We trust government with our security, our rights, our tax dollars, and many of our important interests. Even the Conservatives would agree with this point.

Let me give an example. On April 3, when we were debating the last omnibus budget implementation bill, I stood up and asked the Conservative speaker why the omnibus bill had corrections to the previous omnibus bill, which had corrections to the previous omnibus bill, which had corrections to the previous omnibus bill. I said that perhaps we should not be limiting debate but instead taking our time and getting it right for once.

The answer the parliamentary secretary provided was simply that they were right because they won the elections in 2006, 2008, and 2011. That is what the Conservative member said. They are relying on the legitimacy of their own election when they are cornered and do not have a good argument in debate. Therefore, even the Conservatives must believe in the importance of the legitimacy of the people's government, and as far as we know, fair and democratic elections are the most legitimate way of choosing a government.

If we want to have fair, legitimate elections, we have to have a consensus among MPs from different parties if we want to change the rules or the laws surrounding how elections work or how Parliament works under the statutes. Elections and elections law serve the people of our country, not the parties. Parliament serves the people of our country, not political parties.

Business of Supply

If we really believe this, then we must accept that all Canadians must have a voice through their members of Parliament when changes are considered in the structure of elections or in the structure of the people's Parliament. These are two of the fundamental institutions of our democracy. During debate, there have to be real answers. There has to be solid evidence that is presented, poked, tested, and confronted. Through debate, questions have to be answered. We have to have real questions, and real debate has to occur.

For example, under Bill C-23, 120,000 Canadians who relied on vouching to vote in the last federal election would no longer have that ability. Why get rid of vouching and risk disenfranchising them or other Canadians who want to vote?

It is not good enough for me to just ask that question here in the chamber on behalf of Canadians. It is necessary for me to demand and insist on a real answer to that question for Canadians over and over again, because so far all I have heard are deflections on that point. We need time to insist over and over again on real answers from the government. At some point, even the Conservatives will become embarrassed by how they are not answering the real, tough questions that are being posed by MPs.

Time is needed for all MPs from all over the diverse parts of our country to be heard. Every Canadian, through their MP, needs to be heard on questions involving the fundamental parts of our democracy. Elections and Parliament are too important to be changed by a partisan bill that a majority pushes through.

Canadians perhaps want to be governed by a majority. Sometimes they will say they want to give another party a chance to govern. What they really mean is they want to hand the ball to the other team, not change the rules of the game. If we try to change the rules of the game, as Bill C-23 proposes to do, we cannot just have one team deciding, especially when Parliament and the clash between political parties is not just a game. It is an adversarial system, and in order to make the best laws and to spend money in the wisest way for Canadians, it ensures that no stone is left unturned.

With Bill C-23, it certainly appears that the Conservatives are changing the rules for elections to help themselves. They would make it harder for students and seniors and aboriginals to vote. Wealthy donors would be able to donate more. Central poll supervisors would come from a list provided by the incumbent party, which in most ridings is the Conservative Party, instead of through the simple option of letting all recognized parties in the House of Commons provide a list from which Elections Canada could choose central poll supervisors.

● (1205)

We have also seen the government try to intimidate the Chief Electoral Officer with some procedural manoeuvres, such as trying to cause votes in order to break up his testimony at committee. Not only do the Conservatives want to change the rules; the Minister of State for Democratic Reform also personally attacked the Chief Electoral Officer and was even publicly reprimanded by former auditor general Sheila Fraser for doing that. To put it in simpler language and draw a picture, the Conservatives want to change the rules of the game to favour themselves, and if the referee protests, they punch out the referee.

In changing the law around elections or Parliament, it is important to do it right, and it is more important to do it right than to do it quickly. There is a case for expediency when managing a fast-moving economy; for example, we have a bill to encourage rail companies to move grain to ports, so there are certain advantages for our country when it is governed by a majority government and majority powers are used judiciously. However, when amending the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act, we should be acting as representatives of all of our constituents, not just the ones who voted for us or our parties. Every constituency should get to speak, but with time allocation, not all MPs get a chance to speak. Every MP should get a chance to speak if he or she wants to, and that is why we should pass this motion today.

To conclude, I want to call on all Canadians. I understand that the vote on this motion will take place in a couple of weeks, on Monday, April 28, after Easter. MPs will return to their constituencies and will be interacting with the people who live in their ridings. I am calling on all Canadians to contact their MPs and tell them that they want all Canadians to have a say on laws that change how elections are run. Election law is not made to serve parties that are fighting each other; it is made to serve the people, by ensuring that the vote is as fair as possible and the government that is elected is as legitimate as possible.

To all Canadians I say that if they believe that MPs work in Ottawa to represent the people back home, then their MPs must support this motion. If Conservative and NDP members believe when they go home that they are only the representatives for the Conservative Party or the NDP, then they should go ahead and vote against this motion. I think a lot of Conservative MPs do not believe that, and I encourage them to follow their beliefs and to vote for this motion.

I believe I represent Kingston and the Islands in the Parliament of Canada and I chose to be in the Liberal Party not because I want to represent the Liberal Party but because I believe the Liberal Party is best for Canada. I represent the people of Kingston and the Islands in Ottawa and I challenge the member for Calgary Southwest, who is the Prime Minister, to stand on guard for Canadian democracy and to forswear closure when debating changes to the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.

Finally, I repeat, I ask all Canadians to contact their MPs over the next two weeks and tell them that they want all Canadians to speak through their MPs if laws about elections or Parliament are being changed.

● (1210)

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate, and one thing I have noticed this morning is that the only thing that has outweighed the hyperbole is the vitriol.

I can assure the hon. member that there has never been a time that I have personally been embarrassed or have been embarrassed for my family, my kids, or my kids' kids about defending our government's legislation. I do that boldly and proudly, and thank you very much.

Business of Supply

Since the member talked mostly about the fair elections act and not about the motion before the House today, I want to ask him if he has spoken to his constituents regarding the 39 different pieces of identification that can be used at a poll, or if he has tried to communicate with them to make they have one of those, which is easily obtainable, or if he has specifically talked to his constituents about making sure that the Commissioner of Canada Elections has the ability in the Office of Public Prosecutions to be more independent and not only hold parliamentarians and the electoral process to account but also hold Elections Canada to account because then there will be a neutral office to do that?

I wonder if he has talked to his constituents about those kinds of aspects and what they have said to him in that regard.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, one thing we discovered in talking to people in the last election is that it is hard for students to prove where they live. It is easy for people to prove their identity. Lots of people have pieces of ID with their picture and their name. It is quite a bit harder to prove where one lives. We discovered that a lot of students and young people do not have easy access to that identification. That example is an excellent one.

The member may or may not know that when it comes to the commissioner of elections, I have mentioned it a number of times and it has been mentioned in the press as well, we know that one of the problems with Bill C-23 is that the commissioner does not have the ability to compel witnesses. For example, when we found out that somebody impersonated my campaign manager in my riding, even with those pieces of information we had it was hard for the commissioner to force somebody to testify. We know that voters were misled and told to go to a different poll very far away from where they lived. The commissioner does not have the power to compel witnesses to figure out who did that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again to speak to my colleague's discourse because this is the problem I have right now. I am going through a process where I know that this bill will disenfranchise a number of people in the isolated northern communities. There is no question about it. That is what will happen. It has happened with the photo ID bill, even with the vouching.

This is the current situation there. A person who does not have ID comes into a polling station in Fort Good Hope where the people there might have known him for 40 years and they would not be able to vouch for him. He does not have his ID with him. Perhaps he left it. Perhaps he lost it. Perhaps he cannot get access to his house because of his key. There will be reasons why people do not have identification with them when they get to the polling station. Those people sitting around that polling station could all vouch him. They have known him for 40 years, yet he will be turned away. This is a disgrace.

I looked at the election in Afghanistan. The people were very concerned that everybody gets to vote. As long as they have a clean finger they get to vote. If they do not have a clean finger, they go out the door. That is the way a fledgling democracy knows that the right to vote is absolutely important.

The Afghani people got it better than these guys across the way. What is going on in this country?

●(1215)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The Chair has tried on numerous occasions to signal the member that his time is up. I would appreciate if he—

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, you can have my time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I will give the House another fine example of what the member for Western Arctic is talking about.

The health card belonging to the sponsor of this motion, the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, does not have his address. His driver's licence has a P.O. box. If when he went to vote the officials were to follow the rules, they would say, "Sorry, you do not have something that proves where you live". There would be 20 people there saying, "This is my member of Parliament. I know that person lives here and is my member of Parliament. You have got to let him vote". This is the sort of thing that Bill C-23 overlooks. It is a fine example of how even a member of Parliament does not have the identification to officially prove his residence. Therefore, there has to be some sort of allowance for vouching.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that would be the case. Of course, for a lot of people, it is a situation where three things are needed to qualify for their ID or proof of residency. They need to be over 18, a Canadian citizen, and have a residence, which in many cases they cannot prove because they receive their utility bills electronically, so that cannot be used.

I do not how the Conservatives have road tested a lot of this theory they have about eliminating vouching, but here is the problem. They say that to eliminate vouching is to eliminate fraud. Every irregularity that is put forward as something that happened, such as the signature being out of place, the registration certificate having something wrong with it, or the voucher's name not being put down—all of that, to them, becomes "fraud".

The Conservatives have this pesky mosquito in the House and they are trying to kill it with a sledgehammer. They throw out vouching as a result of that, which is ridiculous. Every system they have needs improvement. We constantly try to improve the ways in which we vote and exercise democracy.

Here we have a situation where it was not about fixing something. To the Conservatives, it was an opportunity to isolate a portion of the population that may not be amenable to the way they are thinking. As a result, they put in these rules by which they say, "Look, we have finally got some proof here. It is some small proof that we can eliminate a fundamental part of our democracy and how we do democracy".

What I would like to ask my hon. colleague is that, by doing this today with something as fundamental as the Parliament of Canada Act and the Elections Act, is it not required that we have a full debate and consultation within—

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Again, before I go to the member for Kingston and the Islands, I would like to remind all hon. members that during questions and comments, members are usually given about a minute or a minute and ten seconds to put a question, and it is similar for the answer.

The Chair clearly sends a signal. We are loath to interrupt people mid-sentence, but somewhere around a minute and a half, the Chair will cut you off so that your colleagues also have an opportunity to ask questions.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, during this debate today, we have heard from the members for Western Arctic and Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. They are from far-flung regions of the country. That is why we have debate and why we should allow all members of Parliament to speak when we are discussing issues related to the foundations of our democracy, as in how to run elections.

The last two questioners are excellent examples of why it is important to hear members of Parliament from all parts of Canada.

When we ask questions about Bill C-23 in question period, we hear pretty much uniquely from the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, who represents a suburb of Ottawa. We keep hearing from him over and over again. That is not as good as hearing from members who represent all parts of Canada.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would my hon. colleague over here say that his words were “every member of Parliament should have an opportunity to speak”?

The Parliament of Canada sits about 33.5 hours a week. It sits for 27 weeks a year. Out of those 33.5 hours a week, 10 hours are taken out for question period and for private members' business. That leaves us 23.5 hours a week to talk about this. If we multiply that by 27 weeks, that gives us 634 hours a year to debate things in the House of Commons. If we divide that by 308 MPs, that is two hours. If we divide that by 15-minute sections for questions and comments, that means every member of Parliament in the House would have an opportunity to speak to eight pieces of legislation per year.

Does the hon. member over here honestly think that the motion he is presenting today is logical in getting the business of the Government of Canada done, speaking to eight bills a year?

• (1220)

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, the minister came up and brought a motion imposing time allocation after only three speakers. I think we could have had more than three speakers.

Regarding the other things, I would say that there are some bills we have to pass through to fix the Conservatives' mistake and get the grain to ports on the west coast. That is something we undoubtedly have to speed through.

However, when we are talking about the foundational institutions of our democracy, in how we run elections, surely we could let more members of Parliament speak.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to speak to the motion brought forward by my opposition colleagues.

I note that my colleagues from the Liberal Party were not inclined to take up any of the suggestions made by the government House leader last Thursday. I would also welcome the opportunity to debate how his party would propose to eliminate the budget deficit, a commitment our government made to the Canadian people, which we will deliver on next year.

Today we are debating the motion from the Liberal Party, dealing with the long-standing provisions in the standing orders related to the curtailment of debate. In particular, the motion seeks to amend the standing orders so that one could not use the procedural mechanisms of either closure or time allocation in relation to any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.

This limiting of the motion to these two acts obviously comes as no surprise, given that the opposition parties are opposed to our government's fair elections act, which would amend the Canada Elections Act. While the focus of my remarks today will be on Standing Orders 57 and 78 and their histories, evolution, and appropriateness, I would also like to take a minute to make a few observations on this particular aspect of the motion.

I would contend that if it were not for their opposition to the fair elections act, we would not be debating this motion at all today. Previous governments of different partisan stripes have long used these procedural mechanisms to curtail debate when they were in government. Of particular note, there is good reason why my Liberal colleagues did not include in their motion, amendments to the standing orders to change how closure or time allocation is used.

Their real opposition is with a particular bill before Parliament, and I expect most of their comments today will be directed toward that bill, as opposed to the Standing Orders. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to state my support for the fair elections act, and I will quote the Minister of State for Democratic Reform as to why I believe the bill should be passed:

...the fair elections bill would ensure that everyday Canadians are the players in the game, that special interests are pushed to the sidelines of the game, and that rule-breakers are pushed out of the game altogether.

He went on to say:

It would close big-money loopholes, impose new penalties on political impostors who make rogue calls, and empower law enforcement with sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

As I said, what I would like to focus my remarks on today is the history and evolution of Standing Orders 57 and 78. By highlighting their evolution, I think it will become clear to those following this debate, possibly even to the members opposite, why these procedural mechanisms that curtail debate are necessary and appropriate.

Business of Supply

Often in this place, the terms “closure” and “time allocation” are incorrectly switched and misused, especially by the opposition. To be clear, Standing Order 57 provides the government with a procedural mechanism to force a decision by the House on any matter currently under debate. This is referred to as “closure”. Whereas, Standing Order 78 sets out the procedural mechanism for restricting the length of debate on bills through “guillotine motions”; referred to as “time allocation”. The standing order actually has three subsections that set out different kinds of restrictions which apply to the allocation of time, depending on the degree of acceptance among the representatives of all parties.

Before I provide an overview of the evolution of these two standing orders, I would like to quote three sources: the current government House leader; a past government House leader; and *Beauchesne’s*, which is one of our procedural bibles. Each of these statements address the necessity and appropriateness of using such procedural mechanisms. To begin, on page 162 of *Beauchesne’s* it reads:

Time allocation is a device for planning the use of time during the various stages of consideration of a bill rather than bringing the debate to an immediate conclusion.

A compelling argument as to the necessity of time allocation motions was made by the former Liberal government House leader when speaking to the report of the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of Procedures of the House of Commons, the last time the rules regarding time allocation and closure were amended.

• (1225)

On October 4, 2001, as per page 5946 of the *Debates*, he stated:

Time allocation is necessary, of course, when debating legislation, so that the government can put through its legislative program. The opposition parties are, I am sure, aware of that necessity but they object when the government makes use of it.

I will leave it to the House to decide who has stated this principle more eloquently and effectively, but in keeping with the words of a former Liberal government House leader, our very own government House leader has also tried to convey this principle to our colleagues in opposition. As recently as April 3, 2014, he stated the following with respect to time allocation and Bill C-31:

Of course, time allocation is not used by this government to shut down debate, because here we are debating, which we will be doing tomorrow, Monday, and Tuesday. It is used as a scheduling device so that all members of this House can have certainty and confidence about when the debate will occur, and more importantly, about when the vote will occur and when the decision will ultimately be made. That is very important.

I find it very interesting that this same practice that was used many times by the Liberals when they were in office is now being criticized by that same party. Canadians are not fooled, however. They expect this from the “do as I say, not as I do” Liberal Party.

I would now like to provide an overview of the history and evolution of these two procedural mechanisms, as it is important to note how they came to be established as rules in our Standing Orders and how they have evolved over time.

While neither closure nor time allocation existed as procedural mechanisms at the time of Confederation, it did not take long before it was recognized that complete freedom of debate was impossible

and that some restraint would have to be exercised, or some accommodation reached, for the House to conduct its business within a reasonable timeframe.

In the years following the turn of the century, the inability of the House to come to a vote on a question was not infrequent, leading often to long, protracted debates.

This led to the House in 1913 adopting amendments to its rules to add a mechanism to end debate called “closure”—effectively our current Standing Order 57. Other rules then followed that also addressed the issue of lengthy debates, including limiting the length of the speeches of members in 1927 and, in 1955, further limits were imposed on certain debates.

Closure was applied 11 times from 1913 to 1932, but then was not used again until 1956, when the pipeline debate took place. That spring, during the acrimonious debate on the bill, entitled, “An act to establish the Northern Ontario Pipeline Crown Corporation”, closure was invoked at each stage of the legislative process. It was the only mechanism, at the time, that the government could use to advance this legislation.

With respect to legislation, the use of closure was deemed to be somewhat inflexible and inadequate as a tool for conducting the business of the House. Discussions began with a view to looking at ways in which the time of the House could be better managed with respect to the consideration of bills. It was felt, as highlighted by the pipeline debate, that the closure mechanism was not effective in advancing legislation, since the process of giving notice, moving the motion, and voting on it had to be repeated at every stage of a given bill.

In the 1960s, as the business of the House became more complex, the House agreed to establish a number of special committees charged with considering the procedures of the House and, in particular, to make suggestions to expedite public business. It was recognized that the complexity of legislation was increasing and that procedural mechanisms were needed to ensure that business would be dispatched within a reasonable amount of time.

Agreeing upon a mechanism was not easy. In the 10th report of the Special Committee on Procedure and Organization, presented to the House in 1964, it was acknowledged that it was difficult to reach an all-party agreement on the proposal to deal with the fundamental question of the allocation of time, and so no recommendation was made at that time.

Following the report, early in the next session, the government moved a resolution that included a time allocation mechanism. It called for the creation of a business committee that would propose an allocation of time for the specific item of business referred to it. If unanimous agreement could not be reached by the committee, consisting of a member from each party, a minister could then give notice during routine proceedings that at the next sitting of the House, he or she would move a motion allocating the time for the item of business or the stage.

Business of Supply

●(1230)

The government's resolution was debated for 12 days and amended to provide, in the instance where unanimous agreement could not be reached, for a minimum of two sitting days at the second reading stage, two sitting days at the committee stage, and one sitting day at the third reading stage.

Eventually this proposal was hived off from the resolution and studied by a special committee. The committee proposed a further amendment that would allow the Speaker to extend the sitting on the final day of a time allocation order applying to third reading of a bill. On June 11, 1965, the proposal was adopted as provisional Standing Order 15(a).

In the following Parliament, the House decided not to extend the provisional Standing Order 15(a). Instead, the House referred the matter of time allocation to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization.

On June 20, 1969, the House adopted the third report of the committee, which provided for three options under which a time allocation order could be made—effectively the basis for our current Standing Order 78.

The procedure mechanisms for closure and for time allocation have remained, by and large, unchanged since they were established in 1913 and 1969 respectively. There have been a few minor changes, which I will briefly outline

With respect to closure, the mechanism has been modified on only three occasions. In each case, the change related to the time for putting the question. In 1913, the time for putting all questions necessary to dispose of the closure motion was fixed for 2 a.m.

Subsequently, the time was moved back one hour to 1 a.m. in 1955, in order to conform with the change made to the ordinary time of adjournment. The time was then moved back to 11 p.m. in April 1991, and finally to 8 p.m. in October 2001.

Similarly, there have been only a few amendments to the time allocation Standing Order. In June 1987, amendments were adopted to provide that time allocation motions after only oral notice would be moved under government orders rather than under motions during routine proceedings, and that debate on items of business under consideration at the time the motion was moved would be deemed adjourned.

Then in 1991, the House agreed to remove the two-hour debate on the time allocation motion moved pursuant to then Standing Order 78(2) and 78(3). The motion was to be decided forthwith. In addition, the text of the Standing Order was amended to provide that if the time allocation motion were moved and adopted at the beginning of government orders and the bill under question was then called and debated for the remainder of that sitting, that would count as one sitting day for the purpose of the Standing Order.

As is the case with many Standing Orders, practice and Speaker's rulings have also played a role in defining how the procedural mechanism of time allocation is to be used. The following are a sampling of some of the key rulings since the implementation of such a Standing Order in 1969.

In December 1978, Speaker Jerome ruled that a time allocation motion could be moved covering both report and third reading stages, even though third reading had not yet begun. Speaker Sauvé confirmed in 1983 that notice of intention to move a time allocation motion could be given at any time.

Speaker Fraser ruled that an oral notice of a time allocation motion need only be a notice of intention and not notice of the actual text of the motion.

Finally, in 2001 a new Standing Order was adopted, flowing from a recommendation in the report of the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of Procedures of the House of Commons that I referenced earlier. Standing Order 67(1) was adopted, providing for a 30-minute question and answer period when a closure motion or a time allocation motion, without the agreement of any of the opposition parties, were moved on a bill. During this 30-minute period, questions would be directed to the minister sponsoring the item of business under debate, or to the minister acting on his or her behalf.

From the historical overview I have just provided, I think that it is telling that these procedural mechanisms have not only been longstanding, but that they have also remained largely unchanged since they were implemented.

I would venture to say, therefore, that the reason for this is that they fulfill an important purpose, that is to provide the government of the day with a tool to ensure that legislation can be debated and advanced through the House in a timely fashion. This is a tool that all governments have used to date.

Without such a tool being available to the government of the day, the opposition would be able to indefinitely delay each and every government bill. That would be undemocratic and would not recognize the mandate given to the government by the Canadian people.

●(1235)

In closing, I need only go back to the second session of the 37th Parliament to highlight an example of the use of time allocation on a bill that would violate the conditions set out in the motion that we are debating today. It was the previous government, and the very same government House leader I quoted earlier, that moved a time allocation motion for Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act (political financing). Therefore, I question not only the purpose of today's motion, as it is clear that the procedural mechanisms of closure and time allocation serve an important role in this place, but also the sincerity of the party opposite, as those members know full well that without this mechanism, governments would be unable to pass virtually any bill.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the overview of the evolution of the two Standing Orders in question by my colleague, but I think his assumptions at the end that nothing would otherwise get passed are certainly over the top.

Business of Supply

In this particular case, we have two fundamental acts that need to be fully debated in the House, and there are reasons of convention as well. It is a matter of tradition that we always achieve consensus on something as fundamental as these two acts. I believe that anyone who wants to be heard in the House certainly has a right to be heard. Again, after there were only three speakers on the last bill, given the amount of opposition to it and the discussion about it, I certainly do feel this is important.

There is such a thing as time allocation for dilatory motions by those who nefariously attempt to hold up the business of Canada. However, there is also the abuse of a tool within our Standing Orders, which we should be treating with the utmost respect. This is why I ask the House to pass this motion to codify the protection of these two acts.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I respect the work that my hon. friend does here in the house. However, we have been debating Bill C-23 now for four hours. We have had 42 speakers on the bill.

As I outlined in my remarks, and as my hon. friend from my own party noted earlier, we need to take into account the limited number of hours that we have in this place and the limited amount of time allotted to each member of Parliament. If we were, in the fullness of time, as my hon. friend indicated, to let every member speak on every piece of legislation, each member would only be allowed to speak on eight bills throughout the life of a current year in Parliament. That is unacceptable. The Canadian people sent us here to engage in the fullness of debate, not only with our own members but also with opposition members.

We on the government side believe in full debate. We believe that this bill has been debated for a robust number of hours. We believe that the fair elections act is a fair bill, and we stand behind it as a government. I know that the Canadian people also do.

• (1240)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his words on this motion that we are debating today.

To be clear, I am going to support the motion, even though it is limited. I wish it covered far more than the two bills it does cover. However, I am delighted that my colleagues at that end of the House of Commons are better late than never, because they also had a propensity to use time allocation and closure motions.

I want to remind my colleague who just finished his speech that 55 time allocation motions and 6 closure motions were moved during this sitting of Parliament. When time allocation is moved even before there are speakers on a motion or notice being given, it really does limit debate.

I will use the budget bill as an example. I did not get an opportunity to speak on that motion because so little time was allocated, and it is a critical bill. However, it is like a telephone book with many issues in it.

Does my colleague not believe there should be a fair amount of time allocated to debate, and that we not have the truncated process we are being bullied through?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to my hon. friend that if she did not have sufficient time or an opportunity to speak to her own bill that she address that to her own party's leadership. Maybe it is more of a reflection on her than on anything else.

The current Standing Orders, as they stand, seem to be fine when the New Democrats put forward private members' bills from a number of their own members. The member for Pontiac and also the Leader of the Opposition have put forward private members' bills that were governed by the same regime of Standing Orders. It seemed to work fine for them then. The Standing Orders work fine for Parliament now.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not unusual that bills of this type attract a lot of attention in Parliament. After all, this is the one occasion when we can be guaranteed that every single decision-maker is both an expert, having been through the electoral process, and a stakeholder, who cares about the electoral process. That is why, through all of Canadian history, these types of bills have attracted a disproportionate amount of attention.

I go back to 1885, with the franchise bill, for example. Sir John A. Macdonald brought forward an electoral reform bill that proposed to extend the vote to women and aboriginals. The Liberals so fiercely opposed those changes, because they thought they were partisan and would aid the Conservatives, that they held up the bill for the better part of two years, because these kinds of devices were not available. Only did the bill pass once Sir John A. and the Conservatives reluctantly removed the provision for votes for women. As a result, it delayed the vote arriving for another quarter-century or more. Of course, the Liberals took away the vote for aboriginals when they won government in 1897, with Laurier's bill on the same subject matter.

Is it not unfortunate that these kinds of good progressive changes were actually blocked by the ability to debate unlimited by the opposition in those cases, and as a result, women were denied the vote?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend is absolutely right. Our government was sent here by the Canadian people to get a job done. We made a number of commitments in the 2011 election. We have been fulfilling those commitments, and we intend to fulfill them all. We have respect for the voters of this country, and that is why we are introducing the fair elections act to even improve our own democracy and improve voter turnout in the next election.

I would agree with what my hon. friend has said and what he has indicated. We should maintain the Standing Orders as they are, as they appear today.

I would add that earlier in my remarks I may have indicated that we had only four hours of debate. It was four days of debate. Let me correct that to ensure that it is clear in the record.

Points of Order

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding what happened 120 years ago, I was wondering if the hon. member could talk specifically about Bill C-23, in this particular case. He talked about the enfranchisement of voters, or really the disenfranchisement. Obviously, the way this bill has been handled, there is no consensus whatsoever.

I want the member to rely upon a third person, outside of this House and outside the structure of party politics, and to quote from that person as to why Bill C-23 is so good.

● (1245)

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, if my hon. friend were right, I would agree with him, but unfortunately, he is not. The Liberals tend to talk about nothing, because that is what they tend to be expert at.

Going door to door in my riding of York Centre, which I do often, people tell me that they are looking forward to the new fair elections act, because they know that having to vouch for somebody is not a fair way of indicating voters. As our Prime Minister has said, it is important that we have a secret ballot and not secret voters in our elections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I believe the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert is rising on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a very important point of order.

On Tuesday morning, during routine proceedings, the chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food reported Bill C-30 back to the House with amendments. I wish to seek a ruling from the Chair as to whether an amendment to Bill C-30, adopted by the committee, is in order.

I understand that generally, the Chair does not involve itself with the business of committees, given that committees are masters of their own proceedings. However, as Speaker Milliken pointed out on February 27, 2007, at page 7386 of the *Debates*, ruling on a similar matter:

As the House knows, the Speaker does not intervene on matters upon which committees are competent to take decisions. However, in cases where a committee has exceeded its authority, particularly in relation to bills, the Speaker has been called upon to deal with such matters after a report has been presented to the House.

I submit that an amendment moved by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, and adopted by the committee, is out of order, because the committee has exceeded its authority.

The amendments to the committee-adopted subsection 116(4) seek to add an entirely new and different provision to the Canada Transportation Act that was clearly not envisioned in the original draft of Bill C-30, as tabled and passed by the House at second reading on Friday, March 28, 2014.

The summary of the original Bill C-30 states that:

This enactment amends the *Canada Grain Act* to permit the regulation of contracts relating to grain and the arbitration of disputes respecting the provisions of those contracts. It also amends the *Canada Transportation Act* with respect to railway transportation in order to, among other things, (a) require the Canadian National Railway Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company to move the minimum amount of grain specified in the *Canada Transportation Act* or by order of the Governor in Council; and (b) facilitate the movement of grain by rail.

Bill C-30, as originally tabled, was about moving grain. It is much needed. It is a serious problem with respect to farmers getting their grain to market. However, the amendment, tabled at committee by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Foods, and adopted by the committee, seeks an entirely new power:

Subsection 116(4) of the *Canada Transportation Act* is amended by adding the following after paragraph (c):

(c.1) order the company to compensate any person adversely affected for any expenses that they incurred as a result of the company's failure to fulfill its service obligations or, if the company is a party to a confidential contract with a shipper that requires the company to pay an amount of compensation for expenses incurred by the shipper as a result of the company's failure to fulfill its service obligations, order the company pay that amount to the shipper;

The Minister of Agriculture may believe that this is a favourable amendment, and it may very well be. The problem is that it exceeds the authority of the original bill and provides quite an extraordinary remedy in that it gives the regulator the power to award damages in the absence of any procedural fairness, any rule of law, or any discoveries.

In the ruling on the power of a committee to make amendments, Speaker Fraser ruled, on April 28, 1992, at page 9801 of the *Debates*, stating:

When a bill is referred to a standing or legislative committee of the House, that committee is only empowered to adopt, amend, or negative the clauses found in that piece of legislation and to report the bill to the House with or without amendments. The committee is restricted in its examination in a number of ways. It cannot infringe on the financial initiative of the Crown, it cannot go beyond the scope of the bill as passed at second reading, and it cannot reach back to the parent act to make further amendments not contemplated in the bill no matter how tempting this may be.

It may have been very tempting to amend the bill to provide for compensatory powers within the regulator, but it falls outside the four corners of Bill C-30 as it was adopted by the House.

Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that in this instance, the amendment to Bill C-30 is both beyond the scope of the bill and also reaches back to make changes to the Canada Transportation Act that were not contemplated by the bill. The amendment passed by the committee has the effect of giving the Canada Transportation Agency the right to award damages, a right that at this point in time has been the sole purview of the courts.

● (1250)

The amendment to subsection 116(4) is out of order, because it does not relate to the original subject matter of Bill C-30 as introduced and passed by the House at second reading and because it introduces new issues that were not part of Bill C-30 as originally introduced. The amendment is therefore beyond the scope of Bill C-30 and should be removed from the bill. I look forward to a ruling from the Chair.

Business of Supply

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the tradition of this place, when a point is raised and a ruling requested, obviously there has to be representation from all sides so that you can bring back a ruling that takes fully into account the arguments and facts. The government would like to contribute to this particular discussion, and we will be making a timely submission so that you can make that ruling.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point that the Liberal Party may want to come back on this point that has been raised. The member articulated his point and his side of the argument. I would point out, though, that the compensation he is talking about in the amendment would not actually be going to the people who are really hurt, which are the farmers. It would be going to the shipper, which is not the farmer in most cases, unless it is a producer car. Therefore, the compensation in the bill would not get to those who are most injured by this particular problem in terms of the supply chain and the transport of grain.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair appreciates the point of order that was raised by the member for Edmonton—St. Albert as well as the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and the member for Malpeque. The Chair will take this under consideration. I would encourage any member or party that would like to respond to this or make a contribution to do so in a timely fashion, given the nature of the point of order in the first place.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—TIME ALLOCATION AND CLOSURE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am most pleased to support my colleague, the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, on the Liberal opposition day motion.

I will not read the actual motion, which is rather technical. The motion speaks to a very serious flaw in Canada's democracy. That flaw was especially revealed in the way that the Conservative government has operated with respect to Bill C-23, the fair or unfair elections act, whatever members want to call it, depending on their perspective, and how the regime would impose its will to the exclusion of all other views. That is a part of what is forcing this motion today.

I listened closely to the member for York Centre earlier, going back through a lot of history and where closure, time limitation, and debate have been used. There is no question that sometimes it is necessary in regular business as a government, in terms of doing the business of a nation.

However, let us understand what has been happening in recent years. There have been omnibus bills, 400 pages in length, dealing with sometimes as many as 40 different pieces of legislation that have nothing to with the budget. In previous times, most of those pieces of legislation would be broken out so that they could go to the

appropriate committee. They would be debated here and would have a full hearing.

It has to be noted that in terms of this motion today that we are only dealing with the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act. What more important business could Parliament have than with those particular acts, which are the underpinnings of our democracy?

We need to ensure, at least on those particular pieces of legislation, that a slight majority government in Canada cannot impose its will in this place. It is one of the flaws in our democracy. The government needs to get things done, but it does not have the majority of the votes in the country.

The Conservative government, in particular, fails to operate for all Canadians; it tends to operate for a certain ideological base. As a result, these laws are not debated and analyzed in a proper, open, and transparent fashion, with the necessary witnesses. As I said, the government is imposing its will on the people and without proper debate.

The rationale behind this motion is that changes to legislation that are fundamental to our democracy should only be made through a consensus-based process. The Conservatives are treating Bill C-23 as another piece of partisan legislation to be rammed through Parliament at their convenience. This needs to be prevented from happening, now and in the future. That is what this particular motion would do. It would ensure that there is the proper debate.

Again, I listened to the member for York Centre, when he said that if we had the opportunity to debate every bill over the course of a term, members would only get to speak on eight bills in the whole term. Nobody is talking about every bill. We are talking about the way that government members continue to operate. They try to misrepresent and mislead the facts by saying something that is spinning it a little, that is a bit close to what the motion is talking about but is not the real thing.

● (1255)

How many hours would it take up in the House of Commons if the committee studying Bill C-23 travelled to every region of the country to hear what Canadians have to say on the bill? Would that not be the proper thing to happen in a democracy, that a committee goes out there to the country with the bill in hand, with all the parties present, and allows witnesses to have their say directly in their own areas, rather than either transporting them to Ottawa or doing a video conference? It should get out in the country where people can be heard, where people from the countryside can come into the meeting, rather than in the kind of bubble that is Ottawa.

Business of Supply

Changes to legislation like the Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act, which are fundamental to our democracy, must be achieved by broad consensus and be backed by solid evidence. That is what the proposal by my colleague, and this motion, is all about, that there be proper debate, in a proper forum, with the proper amount of time on these two pieces of legislation. That is why we, as a party, have introduced the motion today that will change the Standing Orders of the House of Commons to prevent any government from using time allocation and closure to shut down debate on changes to the Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act.

As a member of the Liberal Party, I would point out that if the government continues to run roughshod over Canadians by forcing through its bill, our leader has committed that a Liberal government will repeal the Conservatives' undemocratic changes to our country's Elections Act. That is a sure thing.

How serious is this particular bill? There was an article in iPolitics this morning that fairly aggressively states where Canada will be left if this bill is passed. The article in iPolitics is entitled "The Fair Elections Act is a global disgrace". It is written by Anita Vandenbeld.

Ms. Vandenbeld worked for a number of years internationally, on democratic development with the United Nations Development Programme, the National Democratic Institute, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Parliamentary Centre. She has considerable experience on viewing democracies around the world.

I will not go through all of our arguments; I will go to some of the witnesses before committee. However, I would encourage people, and especially the Conservative backbenchers, that rather than just accepting the speaking points from the PMO, to read this article. She spells out the serious flaws and how Canada is becoming an embarrassment around the world with the way the current government is operating and how it is trying to seriously undermine the main foundation of our democracy.

The key point she makes, which in stark reality shows what her view is on this particular bill and the way that the government is handling it, is this. She states:

The last time I worked in a country where a government used its majority in Parliament to ram through changes to an election law without public input was in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2011. I never would have expected this in Canada.

That tells us how the people with the experience in looking at democracies around the world are looking at the actions of the government.

I have to say this because I hear some chirping from the backbench over there.

● (1300)

People who are on the back bench have to understand that they are not members of the government. The cabinet is the government. They are members of the governing party. They have the right, if they so desire, to stand up in their own right and represent their constituents and Canadians. They do not need to follow the whipped moves from the PMO.

They can stand up and express their own opinion, and on something as fundamental as Canada's election laws and the Parliament of Canada, I would love to see them tonight, or whenever the vote is held, standing up in support of this motion. We would applaud them for showing that, under this regime, democracy could even work in this place. That would be quite startling, and I would love to see it.

Legislation affecting our democratic institutions is too important to be rammed through in a partisan manner by any government. Such legislation should be able to get support from at least one other party in this place. We are all here representing constituents. We cannot be that far apart on issues such as democracy.

One would think that the government would be able to get at least one party on side in support of its legislation. As a result, though, of its not gaining that support, we are seeing an abuse of processes in this place in situations like those with Bill C-23, which is horrible legislation in my view. It seems there is no support from anyone other than the Conservative Party, but it intends to ram it through Parliament.

As such, I maintain that this is an affront to our democracy. Canada was previously seen as a model for other developing democracies, with Elections Canada, government representatives, and spokesmen being asked to profile how we operate in Parliament, how we run elections in this country.

That is all going to be gone, because we are now seen, such as at the United Nations, very differently from we used to be. We are no longer seen as a global leader in terms of peace and democracy around the world. It is because of the way the government operates.

The member opposite says it is because of Bill C-23. No, it is because of the attitude and the way the government has operated in the last eight years. This is a government that came in talking about accountability and transparency, and we have not seen it be accountable for anything.

The minister certainly does not stand up, apologize, and be accountable for what he said to the Chief Electoral Officer. There is no such thing. The minister was responsible, and if the Prime Minister would show some leadership, he would force that minister to apologize for the way he is treating parliamentary officers in this country.

It is an attitude that has pervaded that whole Conservative Party since it came to government, which is making us disrespected around the world.

We are now witnessing in Canada the undermining of debate on bills. I have heard others say this and I think it may in fact be necessary for us in the next election to ask for United Nations observers to come in to observe the election.

The members are laughing over there. However, when we look at this bill, we can see that we may need United Nations observers in this country of Canada because the government is undermining democracy so much. Moreover, as we will see when the vote comes up, not one of those backbenchers will be willing to stand up for Canadians. They are only willing to stand up for their Prime Minister.

Business of Supply

Bill C-23, the so-called fair elections act, is quite literally nothing less than the most comprehensive voter suppression effort in Canadian history.

● (1305)

The bill was designed to exclude, to manipulate, and to undermine the democratic process in Canada, which is the bedrock of our democracy: our election process. The Minister of State for Democratic Reform has performed his task well. He has delivered for his leader the kind of legislation that would only serve to increase the cynicism among Canadians as to the political process, with the result, the Conservatives hope, of driving more voters out of the system, young people in particular.

All one has to do is listen to some of the witnesses who were before committee and listen to what some people are saying in the press. This is a government that views the manner in which Canada conducts federal elections not as something that all parties in the House have an equal share in ensuring works properly but as a system it manipulates to its advantage. That, to the Conservatives, is acceptable.

There are only two kinds of Canadians according to the government party opposite: good Conservatives or bad Canadians. Those who oppose the government are less Canadian, unCanadian, the enemy, subversives. That is the kind of government this legislation is revealing to Canadians that we have in Canada at the moment. There is something suspicious about a government that is attempting to manipulate the democratic system to ensure the disenfranchisement of Canadians, while fearing to allow thorough, open, cross-country public hearings to hear the voices of Canadians. A government with any integrity would have worked with all parties in the House on this legislation and, if not that, would have had the integrity to take the legislation into the country and road test it. It can still do that, if it really wanted to. It could go out and hear from Canadians.

As I said earlier, backbench members over there have the opportunity to stand up and be counted to ensure that there is proper debate, long-term debate, cross-country hearings where everyone can be heard on the Parliament of Canada Act and the Canada Elections Act.

This legislation, Bill C-23, to which the motion today relates, has to be placed in the wider context. That is the fact that the former auditor general, Sheila Fraser, stated that the government would undermine the credibility of virtually every arm's length agency of the government that performs any kind of oversight. Ms. Fraser said, according to *The Globe and Mail* of April 9, that the attack on Mr. Mayrand "disturbed" her greatly, was "totally inappropriate", and that such comments "undermine the credibility of these institutions". She also warned that the bill would unduly limit the Chief Electoral Officer, threaten Elections Canada's independence, and block people, including her own daughter, from voting with the tightened ID requirements. We all respect Sheila Fraser. She is a former auditor general. When she makes those kinds of serious comments, it is time we listen.

Let me list the bill's critics so far. They include Mr. Mayrand; Commissioner of Canada Elections, Yves Côté; two of their predecessors; Ms. Fraser; former Reform Party leader Preston

Manning; provincial chief electoral officers; Harry Neufeld, the author of an authoritative Elections Canada report; law school deans. There was a list on March 11 of well over 100 university professors saying this bill should not go through as is.

● (1310)

I will conclude by saying that this motion would lay down criteria where proper debate has to be held on the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act. I encourage backbench members to stand in their own right to support it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech. As we have already said, the NDP supports this motion.

Why did the Liberals not go even further? The NDP had moved a motion that went much further. It gave more power to the Speaker, in order to prevent the government from using this measure—time allocation—as a guillotine, as his colleague mentioned. A referee, such as the Speaker of the House, could determine when it would be appropriate to use a time allocation motion. Furthermore, this kind of motion should be used only in exceptional cases.

Why are the Liberals afraid to go even further and put an end to this abuse?

● (1315)

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is quite a simple one. I mentioned in my remarks that there are some times, in the course of doing business, when governments do have to move legislation through, and that is understandable.

I think we have a serious problem, though, in terms of the way the government is using budget bills, omnibus bills, and tying in other pieces of legislation that do not have anything to do with the budget whatsoever. Those bills should be carved out so they get the proper debate at the proper committee.

In terms of the member's motion, the Liberal Party's opposition motion that is on the floor today, this would deal with two very important fundamental pieces of legislation that are the foundation of our democracy. We looked at what was possible in determining that motion and we see it quite possible that anybody who really believes in the debate, the discussion that is necessary under those fundamental pieces of legislation, that even backbench Conservative members can—

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

Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed, perhaps the NDP members could bring it up at their next opposition day. They could do quite a large motion if they so desire. That is the beauty of having these opposition days. We can debate certain motions.

Business of Supply

My question for my colleague and friend is this. I want to talk specifically about Bill C-23 here. What I find most egregious here—and I understand there are certain circumstances where time allocation would be used for dilatory movements within the House—is that we have a party and a government, as a result, abusing the system that is supposed to help out the daily functions of Parliament.

The government has decided, after only three speakers, to impose time allocation to cut the number of speakers down.

I agree with the member wholeheartedly that, when we vote for this in a few weeks, we need to say to the backbenchers here that they have the chance, a golden opportunity not given to the vast majority of people in this country, to speak in this House. They should exercise that by ensuring that the laws allowing us to speak in this House are as open and flexible as they can be.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I really think the member's words, “golden opportunity”, are right on. There is a golden opportunity for backbench members on the Conservative side to actually stand to support the foundation for our democracy and give it the due respect it deserves.

I hear them heckling me over there.

I know they get up all the time to talk about their government, “my government”, they say. The backbenchers are not members of the government. They are members of the governing party. They do not have to take direction, as cabinet ministers do, and be absolutely whipped into shape.

On this one, as my colleague said, there is a golden opportunity for Conservative backbench members to stand in this place to support proper debate, discussion on the various pieces of legislation that are the foundation for Canada's democracy.

I look forward to watching them stand in the House to take a position as MPs, rather than being whipped into line by the Conservative whip.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to answer this question.

Why did the Liberals, who supported our motion in 2011, limit their motion here today to just two acts? Are there not other key laws for which the use of time allocation should be limited?

• (1320)

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I really did just answer that question, and members will note that the Liberal Party, in introducing this debate, wants to try to do what is achievable.

We know Conservative members on the other side could not support not limiting debate on everything. They could not do that for various reasons; but we wanted to do what was possible, what was achievable.

These two pieces of legislation are fundamental to our democracy. All Canadians know, with Bill C-23, how the regime over there would undermine our democracy, would actually take away the right

to vote from some. Experts after experts have talked about their concerns on the bill, so Canadians know this is a bad bill.

This is the opportunity to put a motion that deals with two pieces of legislation, the foundation of our democracy, that any members in this House should be able to stand and support, whether they are government or opposition.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that, when Canadians became aware that my colleague from Malpeque was speaking today, they were suddenly glued to their TVs, hoping he might repeat the little pigeon dance that he did yesterday. He disappointed a lot of Canadians, I am sure.

His leader believes that our budgets will actually balance themselves, that we do not need to balance the books, and that they will all look after themselves, but I am wondering if that is what maybe the hon. member thinks as well in regard to debate in Parliament. We could just debate and debate, never call for an actual decision, and just waste time.

All of us have to plan our lives in a way that we can actually accomplish something. Does my colleague not agree that there comes a time when we need to stand up and vote and make a decision?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to decisions, there is no problem with Liberals making them. We balanced the books and turned over a surplus to this government. We put in place the infrastructure program in the beginning. It was the Liberals in government that brought in the gas tax that went to municipalities. We put in place university scholarships and foundations.

We made lots of decisions—some tough ones—and when we turned the government over to the Conservatives, we gave them a surplus with which to work, but all they did ever since was to bring in deficit budgets.

On March 31, the health accord ended, which Paul Martin signed. All the money that went into health in recent years resulted from the decisions of Paul Martin in 2004, not from that government.

The member was talking about the point I made yesterday that dealing with the Minister of State for Democratic Reform was like playing chess with a pigeon. We were hoping that maybe the minister would fly the coop.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak today. Just so my colleague across the way understands, when we get back to this fine institution in a couple of weeks, as a backbench member of the government I will be voting against the motion that is in front of us.

I have done a bit of research and have thought about the motion here in front of us. I basically broke down my presentation into two or three different areas, and hopefully I can get to them all.

First, so the public understands, let me talk about what is happening today.

Business of Supply

Today is a supply day. Supply days were a creation of the Liberal government in 1968. They have been around for a long time. Previous to that time, the estimates, the actual allocating of money, was all dealt with in the House. It took up a tremendous amount of time. There was no time, or very little time, for creating legislation. The Liberal government of the day, in conjunction with the opposition members, came to the conclusion that things could be done more efficiently and effectively by allocating 25 days of the year to supply.

This means that the opposition parties can bring forward any motion that they would like on any topic that they would like. I am just guessing, but I think the vision of the day was that opposition parties would be able to bring a non-confidence motion forward and either criticize the government's policies or programs or maybe even present an alternative. That was the fundamental reason for supply days to begin with, and that is what we are doing here today.

I find it a bit strange that the Liberals are using this valuable time in this way. Because the Liberal Party is now in third place, it gets fewer days. Because the days are allocated by the size of the opposition, obviously the official opposition would get more days than the Liberal Party, and today the Liberals are using one of their two spring supply days to talk about process. I thought that was very strange, but I am happy to talk about process if that is what they want to talk about.

I thought maybe they wanted to define "middle class". In part of my research, I was looking up "middle class". The leader of the third party has been talking about the middle class quite a bit, so he must know a lot about it. His father was the prime minister of Canada and his upbringing was not really in the middle class, but I thought maybe it was his grandfather who instilled the middle class piece in him.

I looked in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. I know my family and the vast majority of Canadian families are not mentioned in the *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, but the Trudeau family is. I found out that the former prime minister's father, the grandfather of the present leader of the Liberal Party, was listed there as being a wealthy businessman from Quebec and part of the elite even back in that generation.

I find it very strange that the Liberals are using today to talk about process. Maybe it is because they would have a difficult time talking about what they would like to accomplish, because they really have not indicated a whole lot to Canadians about what they want to do.

This brings to me to the actual motion, which is about time allocation.

The Liberals have chosen two specific areas to talk about in relation to time allocation. I want to make clear that what they are talking about is time allocation. Let me go through the three ways that it can happen.

There is a difference between closure and time allocation. Time allocation is allocating the amount of time in this House to deal with whatever the item happens to be. It makes it much easier and more convenient for us to determine how many speakers we have, when we will do it, and what days we will allocate to speaking on whatever item. It is purely organizational.

There are three ways that I know of that time allocation can happen.

• (1325)

First of all, the public should know that the House leaders from each party meet. They discuss the agenda, or the orders of the day as we call it here, such as, what is going to happen in the House, when things are coming forward, and how much time will be put to them.

It is my understanding that in the past the number one way of allocating time was by agreement between House leaders. For example, a House leader would agree to put up 20 speakers and another House leader would agree to 5 speakers. There would be an agreement on how much time is spent on a particular item. That is how it has happened in the past and it can happen in the future.

Then, when there is agreement, members would come back to the House. The House leaders go back to their whips and organizations, in our case the parliamentary secretary in charge of that area, and they would organize the speakers from our side who would speak to a particular item. The same thing happens with other parties and their critics.

A second way of allocating time is to have an agreement with the majority of the parties in the House. There are three recognized parties in the House, and two of the three can come together to figure out what we want to do. Technically they can allocate the time for whatever the discussion will be on a particular area.

The third way to allocate time is unfortunately what we have had to come to, but it is completely legal and fair. It is that the government of the day can allocate the time. That is not closure; it is not saying that we are not debating something.

I spoke earlier this week when we were debating our budget implementation bill. I was the 69th speaker, and there was going to be a speaker after me. There were 70 speakers at second reading, and five days were allocated to the debate in second reading.

The bill then goes to committee. If there are amendments at committee, it comes back here to report stage, which I did not know about until I got here. That was not mentioned much in the political science books that I read in university. However, there is a report stage. Again, there is an allocation, which may be done through the House leader on the government side or through a negotiation and discussion at the House leaders meeting. However, there is an allocation of time to debate the item, based on the amendments.

As members know, there could be a lot of amendments. The Speaker could group amendments together and we could then have debate on single sets of amendments. It is not just amendments in total, but on single sets. That could go on for a lengthy period of time. The bill then comes back for third reading. Third reading in this House has another time allocation piece to it.

Business of Supply

Unfortunately, what is happening is that we are not able to get agreement from the other side on allocations, so the House leader on our side has to tell the House how much time will be allocated. There is always a 30-minute discussion on the government's allocation of time.

On the budget implementation bill, for example, we allocated five days to it. People can say that five days is not a lot. However, I did a little research on this, and I want people to understand the agenda in terms of the length of time that we are here.

In this calendar year, we will be sitting for 27 weeks in Ottawa, doing Canada's work. We all do plenty of work in our ridings, of course, but this is work on legislation that comes to the House. I then took all of the days that we have in a week and broke it down.

I do not know if people understand this, but there are 20-minute time slots for the speech and 10 minutes for questions and answer. Technically, one could split one's time. Today we have 20-minute slots, but to maximize the amount, it could be 10-minute speeches with a 5-minute question and answer period.

For example, on Monday, we are in the House from 11:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. We have to remove an hour for private members' business and an hour for question period. There are a lot of other things that eat into the time, but I am being judicious in saying that those two things automatically happen. There is also routine procedures and so on, which is another 15 minutes or so. In actual fact, we have about five hours and fifteen minutes on Monday, which is about 21 slots, if we split the time slots.

•(1330)

On Tuesdays there are six hours and fifteen minutes for discussion. That is 25 slots. On Wednesdays it is only a couple of hours, at two hours and fifteen minutes of actual time, which is nine slots. That time gets eaten up with trading over. On Thursdays we are back to the same as Tuesday, with 25 slots. On Fridays we have two hours and fifteen minutes, the same as Wednesday, with another nine slots.

If everything went absolutely smoothly and there were no interruptions or points of order and we went right to the minute and moved along, that is maybe 89 or 87 spots in a week.

I heard a few minutes ago that members of Parliament get elected here to talk about the items. Can members imagine if all members, all 308 of us, were required to speak to every item? We have about 88 spots a week. We are here about 27 weeks of the year. We then have supply days thrown in. We have other items. We have voting. If everything was as smooth as glass, based on my math, we would get maybe two pieces of legislation through every year.

That is not including the budget and the budget implementation bills, because in a sense those are automatics. We have a budget presented by the finance minister. There is debate and discussion on it. Then there are also two budget implementation bills, one in the fall and one in the spring, and time is allocated for debating those bills as well.

My estimate is that if we followed the rule or the expectation that all 308 of us would get a chance to speak to every item, we would get through a maximum of two pieces of legislation in the House.

That is not including committees. The public should know that. As I was saying this week, I was the 69th speaker at second reading. The bill then goes to committee. At committee, members of Parliament hear witnesses and get involved in debate and discussion about the legislation in front of us. The bill then comes back here for the report stage and third reading.

In my view, if there was no such thing as time allocation, as members of Parliament we would get virtually nothing done. I am not sure that the public of Canada is sending us to Ottawa to do absolutely nothing. The public expects some legislation to be passed.

The public expects discussion to take place, and there is discussion. There are speeches from both sides, from one side or the other, and there are often areas of concern or interest. On our side, normally we promoting. On the opposition side, members are often taking exception. Those discussions will happen.

People will notice that comments are often repeated over and over again. We do the same thing on our side. I am not saying that it is a one-sided thing. We repeat the same thing, or something very close to it. I know that the rules of this place are that we cannot say the exact same thing as somebody else. I do not really use speeches, as members can tell by my standing here. I have some notes, but I do not have actual speeches.

What I am saying is that time allocation does not stop debate. It assists debate. It allows fair discussion on the issues, and the limited time that the House has to deal with legislation requires time allocation.

We are being criticized, partially in this motion, over time allocation as if it had never existed before and as if it were something new that we had come up with. As far as I know, time allocation has been part of the process here forever, because it would not make sense to do otherwise.

•(1335)

Stanley Knowles, a New Democrat member of Parliament many decades ago, has been quoted as saying that it is important to have time allocation, that it is important that we have an understanding of how much time we are going to spend on a particular item and move forward to make decisions on whether we are going to support or oppose something.

Business of Supply

The Liberal motion today tries to focus on two specific types of bills. In my view, they have done that because they know very well that time allocation is an important process around here, and they are using these two items for political reasons, not for practical reasons of improving how this place operates. We have a reform bill by one of my colleagues here before us. But in my view, if we really want reform of this place, and we know how little time we have to debate different issues, and given the scheduling that we have to arrange between committees, and so on, I think there are better ways to operate the House of Commons. I have made some suggestions on the number of committees, the timing of committees, and how much time we allocate for House time. We could be much more efficient than we are, strictly from a business perspective.

My concern is that when we hear the opposition say they did not have time to debate it, if we look at the actual speeches they make, they are repetitive and clearly not supporting the actual legislation in front of the House. That is fair. That is their job, to be in opposition. However, they should be able to make their points and then move on. That is not what is happening.

Time allocation and closure are two different things. Closure is a motion invoked when a piece of legislation is required by a certain time, whether it is in other statutes, or a Supreme Court decision has been granted on a certain item and the House has to report back by a certain date. If we check the records, closure is rarely used.

Another item I have heard about recently, aside from the debate on the fair elections act, is omnibus bills. The opposition are concerned about the size of bills, and they will quote big numbers. This week they were quoting it as 489 pages long. I agree that the particular piece we were dealing with this week is 489 pages long, but it is in both English and French, so it is actually about 250 pages. The fair elections act is not even that long, but it is in two languages.

If, say, we have to read a couple hundred pages, I am pretty sure that most Canadians believe that members of Parliament can read a couple of hundred pages. Additionally, what is also great about the way the system works here is that despite the fact legislation arrives before us in legalese, there are summary pages at the front of every piece of legislation highlighting what is important and what each section does.

What happens is that I, as a member of Parliament, read through the summaries and look through the parts of the legislation that are of concern or interest. If there is something I do not understand, I read it in more detail. Then I have an opportunity to talk to the minister. That opportunity is open to every member of Parliament. They normally have a session with a briefing that anyone can attend, including staff. They are briefed at the bureaucratic level on what is in a bill so they will have an understanding of it.

With the amount of time we have, which I am running out of now, I do not think we should support the motion. Time allocation is getting a bad name because people do not understand what it is used for and how it works. It is something that makes the House operate. If we were to ask people on my street, they would believe we are way too slow in getting legislation through the House.

• (1340)

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we coined the parliamentary secretary's turn of

phrase from some days ago, we would say that the Chief Electoral Officer should not be wearing a team jersey. He questioned the whole independence of the Chief Electoral Officer.

I want to remind the House that in September 2011, every agent of Parliament, including the Chief Electoral Officer, wrote to the Speaker and copied the letter to three parliamentary committees, the public accounts committee, the access to information, privacy and ethics committee, and the procedure and House affairs committee.

The seven agents of Parliament asked to meet with parliamentarians, to meet in committee, to talk about the independence and the accountability of the agents of Parliament, including the Chief Electoral Officer.

This side over here had nothing to do with it, would not do anything with it, and refused them entry to the committees. That discussion has never occurred.

The Auditor General and the Chief Electoral Officer asked Parliament three years ago to meet with us and to talk about this. Why did the government not accept the invitation? Why were they not invited to committee? That is what I want to know.

• (1345)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that the motion is about procedure. I know the members are highlighting two areas of procedure they would like to change.

However, on the fair elections act, since the members asked, I want to point out that there have been more than 40 speakers to second reading; 40 speakers from all sides have had an opportunity to speak to it. As we have seen every night in the news and on television, a very proactive committee has met numerous times, inviting numerous guests and witnesses to the committee. We are hearing about it every day. The Senate, for example, is pre-studying the item.

The process is working. The Liberal members may not like the legislation, or parts of it, but through the process at committee they can move amendments. They can do whatever they wish. The process works.

That piece of legislation that is being highlighted here today will also come back to this House for more discussion and more debate. I think that is the appropriate way. We have allocated the right amount of time for it. There has been a lot of discussion on it, and that will continue. That is the appropriate way to deal with legislation.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with interest.

The member was a bit hyperbolic about the timeframe. When we consider any debate that goes on in Parliament, the government has the right to not put up speakers and to reduce the amount of debate in that way.

In looking at the record of the past number of years, we see the debate on the postal workers back-to-work legislation; the government simply put in all-night sessions so it could get through the debate. Really, there are many tools used in the House of Commons to ensure that debate is conducted in a reasonable fashion.

Business of Supply

This bill has so many complex changes to the electoral system, which is the basis of this democracy, that more time is required not only in Parliament but in committee. That is why I think this motion today is very appropriate for this particular bill.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member, who I respect, that this is not a bill; it is a motion. Also, if this motion were to pass and were to change the Standing Orders, it would not just affect the fair elections act; it would affect legislation from here on forward dealing with those areas.

What I did find interesting in the member's comments is that, when we have legislation in front of us and we do not have anything more to say, we do not put any more speakers up, and the opposition criticizes us for that. We are criticized for not putting up speakers when we do not want to waste any more time.

We know what we want to do. We know what Canadians want. We want to get it through this House. We want to get it completed and into law, so we can make a difference for the middle class of this country.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention of the member for Burlington in explaining the process of allocating days with respect to debate and how that is used as a management tool for keeping the House efficient in terms of all the matters it has to consider at every stage of reading. Legislation can flow to committees to keep them focused on important matters and legislation and can move to the Senate, which can consider these matters as sober second thought.

In some countries, because of debate and other means, they do not pass a budget for year X until year Y or year Z. We had a situation in the U.S. Senate, when it did not pass a budget for four years. It debated budgetary matters, when matters have to be decided efficiently.

In the case of Bill C-23, I understand that there are aspects of the bill that have to be implemented in advance of the next election. To do that, it has to clear not only this House but the Senate in a specific amount of time. Can the member talk about how time allocation relates to meeting that standard?

• (1350)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned before that there are certain criteria required in terms of a Supreme Court decision. Another one would be getting ready for the 2015 election. There are timeframes in legislation. If we are to make a change, it has to be done by a certain date. In this particular case, time allocation is a useful tool for the government and this House to plan. If we are to deal with items that will affect Elections Canada in the 2015 election, they need to be in place by that time.

The tool used by the House leader to allocate time is not stopping debate. It is to allocate time to discuss the issue at second reading. How much time will there be at committee, how much time at report stage, and how much time at third reading? It is important for us to get this done in a timely and efficient manner.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was talking about the government's bill to amend the Elections Act coming back to the House and how he is keen to have

further discussion on it. The difficulty is that there has been no sign whatsoever of the Conservatives listening to any of the witnesses so far, particularly people like Marc Mayrand, of Elections Canada; the Commissioner of Canada Elections; the commissioners of elections for provincial governments; the former auditor general, Sheila Fraser; and even an expert witness from Britain. We have become international now.

So many witnesses are attacking this bill. We have a situation where the Commissioner of Canada Elections is trying to investigate alleged fraudulent actions in the last election by Conservative members of Parliament. The Conservatives are making it more difficult for the commissioner to comment on those elections and are making it harder for that person to investigate those elections.

In view of these actions, will the member agree that they really ought to change this bill, in terms of what it does in allowing members who have committed fraud to get elected, to the elect more crooked Conservatives act?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the process is simple. Amendments do not happen on the floor of the House. They happen at committee. The committee is active right now on this bill. There is opportunity for both the official opposition and the third party to bring amendments at committee. It is not a study. It is legislation. They can bring amendments when they go clause by clause. The committee is hearing, from my understanding, a tremendous number of witnesses who have been invited by all sides to talk about what is good and what needs to be improved. The minister would never, in this House, stand up in the middle of the debate happening at committee and move amendments or make any changes. That is what committees are for. That is why they are there. That is why they should be doing their job and working at committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we get a reality check and get some clarity on what we are actually talking about this morning. When we talk about time allocation, what are we really talking about? It is a rule in the Standing Orders that allows the government, at times, to expedite legislation in somewhat of a timely fashion. That is the time allocation rule that we are talking about today in relation to the Canada Elections Act.

Here is the problem. This particular Conservative majority government uses time allocation as part of the normal process. It has absolutely no respect whatsoever for allowing debate on important pieces of legislation. Rather, it constantly brings in time allocation, and it does not matter what type of debate it is. Time allocation is meant to be a tool. The majority Conservative government abuses that tool, and by abusing it, it is abusing members of Parliament preventing them from communicating the concerns of their constituents on legislation that is so very important.

Statements by Members

We need to recognize that the Canada Elections Act is like no other. It defines the rules that apply when we knock on doors and ask for votes, when we ask Canadians to get engaged and vote. This legislation should be designated such that time allocation cannot be applied to it. That is very important to recognize, because it is a fundamental pillar of our democracy. Even now, the government is forcing this legislation through and is using time allocation to do so.

Why is that a problem? It is because the government has no credible source outside of the Conservative Party that supports the legislation we are debating. The Chief Electoral Officer; the previous chief electoral officer; Sheila Fraser; the head of the commission, Mr. Côté; and 100-plus professors from coast to coast to coast in Canada do not support this legislation. Not one political party supports this legislation. The only one that we know is supporting this legislation is the Prime Minister himself, and through the PMO's office the mandate has gone out saying that every Conservative will support this legislation. They have no choice. If a Conservative member of Parliament wants to run as a Conservative in the next election, he or she has to support this legislation.

I say shame on the Prime Minister, shame on his office, shame on the Conservatives who are not prepared to stand up for democracy here in Canada.

Let us take a look at the minister responsible for democratic reform. What has he done lately? He made a verbal assault on the Chief Electoral Officer for doing what he is supposed to be doing. The Minister of State for Democratic Reform needs to apologize. He needs to stand in his place and say that he is sorry not only to the Chief Electoral Officer but to all Canadians for his inappropriate behaviour and the manner in which he is executing this bill through the House of Commons. It is wrong. It is a bad bill.

Yesterday the leader of the Liberal Party talked about allowing a free vote on this legislation. What was the response from the government? We know that the Prime Minister would never want a free vote. A free vote could ultimately embarrass him. After all, there might be some Conservative members who are prepared to put democracy ahead of their own political party and that party's best interests. Why will the Conservative Prime Minister not allow for a free vote on this legislation?

• (1355)

Mr. Speaker, if he believed in democracy, he should at the very least allow for a free vote. All we need to do is to look at the manner in which this legislation has been introduced and pushed through the House. It is being forced through, and we need to allow those Conservatives who have the integrity to stand in their place and say what is happening today with the elections act. It is not the fair elections act, it is the unfair elections act, and the Conservatives know it. This is a Conservative elections act.

However, we are appealing to those who believe in democracy more than the Conservative Party. We are asking them to look at what the motion is talking about today. We are asking them not to continue to force the bill through, but to vote in favour of the motion and allow the legislation to be debated thoroughly. It is a fundamental—

• (1400)

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

Regretfully, the time for government orders has expired. The hon. member for Winnipeg North will have 14 minutes remaining when this matter returns after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

ROBOTICS COMPETITIONS

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has been enriched economically, culturally and socially by the contributions of citizens from all walks of life.

Today I would like to acknowledge the presence of representatives and members of Quebec's Canadian-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ottawa's Canadian-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Lebanese association of Montreal taxi workers.

I am also proud to highlight the achievement of a group of grade five students from Saint-Gérard school who recently won the Robotique FIRST Québec tournament. The school, whose catchment area extends into my riding, will be one of two Canadian teams participating in the FLL robotics world festival in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 23 and 24.

Congratulations, kids, we are proud of you.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, National Volunteer Week is an opportunity to recognize and pay tribute to all volunteers for their selflessness and the exceptional contributions they make to communities across this country.

Volunteers are the backbone of every healthy and vibrant community. Indeed, more than 13 million Canadians contribute over two billion volunteer hours each year building and maintaining resilient communities at home and around the world. Volunteering is part of our identity as Canadians, and our government values the dedication of those who give so generously of their time, often with little to no expectation of recognition.

As we celebrate National Volunteer Week, it is with great honour that I introduce the first annual Don Valley West community volunteer awards. I urge all residents of Don Valley West to visit my website for more information and to download the nomination form. I thank all the tireless volunteers who make Don Valley West the great community it is.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to draw attention to National Volunteer Week. In my riding, Joliette, dozens of people are getting involved in organizations such as the Centre communautaire bénévole Matawinie and the Centre d'action bénévole Émilie-Gamelin.

Having worked as a volunteer for many community organizations myself, I understand the importance of volunteers and the remarkable work that they do. They give so much to their community, but they get something back too.

I encourage everyone to try volunteering. For young people, it is a good way to gain experience. For seniors, it is an excellent way to stay active in the community.

Of course, volunteering does not put food on the table, and it is important to work toward full employment or at least a decent employment insurance system. However, the fact remains that volunteer work makes our communities more active, strong and charitable.

Thank you to all the volunteers in Joliette.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL PARAMEDIC COMPETITION

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the honour to attend the 13th annual National Paramedic Competition held at Durham College. Day in and day out, through community paramedicine and emergency services, paramedics save lives each and every day. They often go into situations that are unpredictable, yet that does not stop them from saving lives. They are truly heroes.

This past weekend, Oshawa residents had the opportunity to see these heroes square off against each other and put their skills to the test to prove that they are the best paramedics in the country. Thirty teams from all across Canada, including Durham Region, competed in three divisions: the advanced care paramedic division, the primary care paramedic division, and the paramedic student division.

Our local heroes did not disappoint. Jeff Hooper and Andrew Mokendanz, of Durham College, finished second in the student division; and Dale Button and Matt Walton, of Durham Region EMS, finished second in the primary care division.

I would like to thank paramedics for all their service to Oshawa and around Canada and congratulate all the winners and participants in the national competition.

* * *

● (1405)

MENTAL HEALTH

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one in five Canadians is affected by some form of mental illness. That means that in this chamber, 60 or more members or families are directly impacted. My family would be included in that number. Our son's diagnosis and prognosis are not good.

We all fear stigmatization, yet the less we speak out, the less likely we are to see some solution in our lifetimes.

Today the Canadian Psychiatric Association is on the Hill to speak to parliamentarians about the importance of mental health. Psychiatrists are an integral part of Canada's health care system. However, many Canadians cannot easily access one, and the average wait time is 11 weeks.

I encourage my colleagues to meet with the psychiatrists today to discuss how the federal government can provide the strategy necessary to implement a mental health strategy and continue to combat the stigma associated with mental illness. If we deal with the stigma, maybe the solutions will follow.

* * *

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to welcome the B.C. Wildlife Federation to the great city of Kelowna this week as it holds its 58th annual general meeting and convention.

The federation is British Columbia's largest and oldest province-wide, volunteer-driven conservation organization. Its mission is to protect, enhance, and promote the responsible use of the environment and to build a legacy of conservation for generations to come.

As this is National Volunteer Week, I would like to acknowledge my constituent, Bill Bosch, the hard-working president of the B.C. Wildlife Federation, and his team and all the volunteers who support our local organizations and improve the quality of life in Kelowna—Lake Country.

As a member of the Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise, I have also seen the positive difference volunteers make throughout the world by supporting global projects such as helping to eradicate polio, in partnership with the Government of Canada.

Volunteerism is a tangible example of the power of action over words, and Canadians continue to be the beneficiaries of those efforts.

* * *

[Translation]

LITERACY ORGANIZATION

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to highlight the excellent work being done by the A.B.C. des Manoirs organization.

A.B.C. des Manoirs provides support to people who want to finish their schooling and improve their knowledge of French and math. The organization helps people who want to re-enter the workforce by providing the training that some people desperately need. It helps many people get a high school or vocational diploma, but most of all, it provides some hope for a better future to people who very much need hope.

Statements by Members

I want to congratulate the people at A.B.C. des Manoirs for the profoundly human work they do so well.

The support provided by this organization goes far beyond financial considerations, and before it even helps people improve their financial position, it gives the people of Montcalm something that no amount of money can buy: dignity.

It will be an honour for me to continue to support its mission. I wish this organization nothing but the best in the coming years.

* * *

[English]

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks my 3,000th day serving as the member of Parliament for Kitchener—Conestoga.

I can no longer count the number of times I have risen in this House to speak to issues regarding mental health, mental illness, and suicide prevention. In Canada, we suffer about 4,000 deaths by suicide each year. About 90% of those victims suffered from a diagnosable mental illness.

Today, members of the Canadian Psychiatric Association are on the Hill, raising awareness of the policies, programs, and investments to prevent and treat mental illness. The CPA asked our government to continue to strengthen the mental health services we deliver, and it expressed its willingness to partner in this effort. At the CPA's breakfast this morning, I heard the stories of Matt and Rachel, two ordinary Canadians, and how they are successfully managing their illness and leading productive lives.

To break the stigma surrounding mental illness, we need to talk about it.

Congratulations to Matt and Rachel for their courage, and our thanks go to the CPA for ensuring that their story is heard.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year Canadians of Indian heritage will celebrate the festival of Vaisakhi on April 14.

It is a day to thank God for the harvest and the many blessings that we have. It also marks the start of the New Year in parts of India and around the world. For Sikhs, Vaisakhi is one of the most auspicious celebrations, as it marks the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh guru.

On behalf of the constituents of Calgary Northeast and the Shory family, Happy Vaisakhi to all.

I would like also like to congratulate my good friend and successful businessman from Calgary, Bob Dhillon, for his acquisition of a sword that belonged to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the first warrior king of the Sikh empire. This sword is the only Sikh artifact of its kind in Canada.

Mr. Dhillon purchased the sword to preserve it and share it with the Sikh community and all Canadians. For that, I commend him.

● (1410)

[Translation]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we mark Volunteer Week, I would like to acknowledge the work of more than two million volunteers who contribute their time and effort to various organizations in Quebec. I have always considered volunteering to be the selfless art of giving of one's love, work and time.

The Centre d'action bénévole de Saint-Hubert and the Centre d'action bénévole "Les P'tits bonheurs" in Saint-Bruno, as well as the Centre de soutien entr'Aidants, the organization Au Second Lieu and our two youth centres, to name just a few, can count on a team of volunteers who want to give back to their community and make a difference.

The riding of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert is fortunate to be able to count on people whose generosity is matched only by their dedication.

On behalf of my community, I would like to salute their exceptional contribution and thank them.

* * *

[English]

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of attending earlier this week an event that featured Canada's Minister of State for Social Development releasing the Mental Health Commission of Canada's final report on housing first.

The research shows that the housing first approach rapidly ends homelessness, is a sound investment that can lead to significant cost savings and, more importantly, works over the long term. As of April 1, our government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, began the shift toward housing first in our homelessness partnering strategy.

Despite this evidence, the Liberal Party does not support housing first. The member for Westmount—Ville-Marie has gone so far as to state that housing first will have a "...negative impact on community outreach programs for homeless Canadians...". Once again, the Liberals show that they are in over their heads by ignoring this evidence-based approach.

On this side of the House, we make no apologies for ensuring that hardworking taxpayer dollars are directed to where they have the largest impact.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):

[Member spoke in Punjabi]

[English]

Statements by Members

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I wish everyone a happy Vaisakhi, the traditional Punjabi harvest and the 315th year of the Khalsa Panth.

I have tremendous respect for the tenets of Kirt Karna, Vand Chhakna, Nam japna, and Seva: working hard, sharing with others, conviction, and community service. These are the values that all Canadians can proudly stand behind and share.

For over 100 years, the Canadian mosaic has been enriched by Sikh communities and others of Indian origin. This is a wonderful time of year to reflect on the significant contributions of these brothers and sisters who have made our wonderful culture.

From coast to coast, Canadians are celebrating this joyous time of renewal by visiting beautifully decorated gurdwaras, joining colourful parades, big and small, and reflecting upon the diversity that makes our wonderful country so strong.

Happy Vaisakhi.

[Member spoke in Punjabi]

* * *

HONG KONG

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recent developments in Hong Kong indicate that the basic law guaranteeing the people of Hong Kong the preservation of their separate democratic system and market economy is not being respected.

This week, several fellow parliamentarians met with two distinguished members of the Hong Kong legislative assembly, who expressed concern that the guarantees of universal suffrage outlined in the basic law are not being followed. They expressed concern about shifting timelines, as well as freedom of the press.

In February of this year, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that pressure was being exerted on Hong Kong news media. In other cases, journalists have engaged in self-censorship for fear of reprisals.

I call for the spirit and letter of the basic law to be respected, so that the people of Hong Kong can freely elect their chief executive in 2017 and have a legislature elected by universal suffrage in 2020.

* * *

•(1415)

VAISAKHI

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next week, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Canadians across our country will celebrate Vaisakhi.

Vaisakhi has different meanings for the different faiths that celebrate the festival. For many, it is a harvest festival, a time to be

thankful for the bountiful harvest. Beyond the traditional harvest thanksgiving, Vaisakhi has a special meaning for many Sikhs. In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh laid down the foundation of the Khalsa Panth.

As members may recall, my riding of Markham—Unionville is the most multicultural riding in Canada. I have always enjoyed celebrating Vaisakhi with my constituents, and I look forward to this year's celebrations.

On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I wish everyone from coast to coast who is celebrating a very happy Vaisakhi.

[Member spoke in Punjabi]

* * *

VAISAKHI

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 14, Sikhs in Canada and around the world will celebrate Vaisakhi, one of the most important observances in Sikhism.

Vaisakhi marks the founding of the Khalsa in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, our tenth Guru. It also marks the beginning of a new year in many parts of India and around the world.

The celebration in Canada focuses on observances at gurdwaras and gatherings with family and friends at vibrant parades and processions. Canada is home to one of the largest Sikh populations outside of India. The Sikh community has made many contributions to our great country in all areas of endeavour and has contributed significantly to Canada's rich diversity and heritage.

On behalf of all of my colleagues in the House, I extend my best wishes to all those celebrating Vaisakhi around the world.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable colleagues, I understand there have been consultations among House leaders and there is general agreement that the House will now suspend.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 2:17 p.m.)

•(1425)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 2:27 p.m.)

The Speaker: Colleagues, it is my understanding that there have been consultations among the parties and independents, and there is unanimous consent for the House to now adjourn. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

(House adjourned at 2:28 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, April 10, 2014

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		41st General Election	
Information Commissioner of Canada		Ms. Laverdière	4521
The Speaker	4519	Ms. May	4521
Government Response to Petitions		Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	
Mr. Lukiwski	4519	Ms. May	4521
First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act		VIA Rail	
Mr. Valcourt	4519	Mr. Toone	4521
Bill C-33. Introduction and first reading	4519	Asbestos	
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	4519	Mr. Martin	4521
Interparliamentary Delegations		41st General Election	
Mr. Aubin	4519	Mr. Côté	4521
Committees of the House		VIA Rail	
Health		Mr. Côté	4521
Mr. Lobb	4519	Mining Industry	
Incorporation by Reference in Regulations Act		Ms. Doré Lefebvre	4522
Mr. Duncan (for the Minister of Justice)	4519	41st General Election	
Bill S-2. Introduction and first reading	4519	Mr. Kellway	4522
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	4519	Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	4522
Business of the House		Canada Post	
Mr. Scarpaleggia	4519	Mr. Caron	4522
Motion	4520	41st General Election	
(Motion agreed to)	4520	Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	4522
Petitions		Mr. Marston	4522
Canada Post		Mr. Cash	4522
Mr. Payne	4520	Democratic Reform	
The Environment		Mr. Rousseau	4522
Ms. Sims	4520	Canada Post	
Democratic Reform		Mr. Chisholm	4522
Ms. Sims	4520	Questions on the Order Paper	
Canada Post		Mr. Lukiwski	4522
Mr. Simms	4520	Privilege	
41st General Election		Remarks by Minister of State for Democratic Reform	
Mr. Scott	4520	Mr. Julian	4523
Canada Post		Mr. Lukiwski	4524
Mr. Lamoureux	4520	Ms. May	4525
The Environment			
Mr. Sandhu	4520		
Rail Transportation			
Ms. Nash	4521		
Public Transit Operators			
Ms. Raynault	4521		
Northwest Territories Devolution Act			
Mr. Bevington	4521		
Impaired Driving			
Mr. Warawa	4521		
Sex Selection			
Mr. Warawa	4521		

Mr. Hsu.....	4534	National Volunteer Week	
Mr. Julian.....	4534	Mr. Carmichael.....	4552
Mr. Hsu.....	4536	National Volunteer Week	
Ms. Nash.....	4536	Ms. Raynault.....	4553
Mr. Hsu.....	4536	National Paramedic Competition	
Mr. Sweet.....	4537	Mr. Carrie.....	4553
Mr. Bevington.....	4538	Mental Health	
Mr. Simms.....	4538	Mr. McKay.....	4553
Mr. Calkins.....	4539	National Volunteer Week	
Mr. Adler.....	4539	Mr. Cannan.....	4553
Mr. Simms.....	4541	Literacy Organization	
Ms. Sims.....	4542	Ms. Perreault.....	4553
Mr. Van Loan.....	4542	Mental Health	
Mr. Simms.....	4543	Mr. Albrecht.....	4554
Points of Order		Vaisakhi	
Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food		Mr. Shory.....	4554
Mr. Rathgeber.....	4543	National Volunteer Week	
Mr. Albas.....	4544	Mrs. Sellah.....	4554
Mr. Easter.....	4544	Homelessness	
Business of Supply		Mr. Butt.....	4554
Opposition Motion—Time allocation and closure		Vaisakhi	
Motion.....	4544	Ms. Sims.....	4554
Mr. Easter.....	4544	Hong Kong	
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard).....	4546	Mr. Trottier.....	4555
Mr. Simms.....	4546	Vaisakhi	
Mrs. Groguhé.....	4547	Mr. McCallum.....	4555
Mr. Albrecht.....	4547	Vaisakhi	
Mr. Wallace.....	4547	Mr. Gill.....	4555
Mr. Byrne.....	4550	Suspension of Sitting	
Mr. Bevington.....	4550	The Speaker.....	4555
Mr. Watson.....	4551	(The sitting of the House was suspended at 2:17 p.m.)..	4555
Mr. Regan.....	4551	Sitting Resumed	
Mr. Lamoureux.....	4551	(The House resumed at 2:27 p.m.).....	4555
		STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS	
Robotics Competitions			
Mrs. Mourani.....	4552		

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