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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 27, 2014
(Part A)

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 27, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[*English*]

PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 38 of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, to lay upon the table the case report of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner concerning an investigation into allegations of wrongdoing.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT AWARENESS DAY ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-601, an act respecting a Government Awareness Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise to introduce two private members' bills today, with thanks to my seconder, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

These bills are particularly special, because they owe their existence to the imaginations and hard work of three young people in my riding of Vancouver Kingsway: Matthew Ching, Liam Kynaston, and Alan Zhou. They are present in the House today. All three students are winners of my Create Your Canada contest, which invites high school students to develop and submit their ideas on how we can make Canada and the world a better place.

Matthew's idea is captured by this bill proposing to establish July 8 as government awareness day. July 8 is the day of Canada's first Parliament, which began in 1867. This would be a day for all Canadians to recognize our democracy, reflect on its importance, and think about ways we can improve it. It would encourage Canadians to take an active role in our democratic process, perhaps by writing letters on topics of interest to their local government MLA, MPP, or MP. In a time of low voter turnout and democratic challenges around the world, this is a positive and creative idea that would strengthen Canadian democracy and citizenship.

I would like to congratulate Matthew and these fine young students on their contributions to Parliament and our country and thank their teachers and all who entered my contest from Gladstone Secondary School, Eric Hamber Secondary School, Windermere Secondary School, and Sir Charles Tupper Secondary School in Vancouver.

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

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FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-602, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (sugar content labelling).

He said: Mr. Speaker, once again, I am honoured to rise to introduce the second of my private members' bills today, which again is a product of the Create Your Canada contest in my riding. Again, it owes its genesis to the imagination and hard work of young students in my riding, Matthew Ching, Liam Kynaston, and Alan Zhou, who are present in the House today.

Alan and Liam's idea is enshrined in this bill called an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, sugar content labelling. This legislation would require all prepackaged foods to prominently display the sugar content on the front of the product. This reflects their research revealing the harmful effects of sugar and its presence in high concentrations in many prepackaged foods, of which many consumers are unaware. This bill would improve the health of Canadians, especially young Canadians, and would provide increased information to Canadian consumers.

Once again, I would like to congratulate Alan and Liam and these fine young students on their contributions to Parliament and our country, and I thank their teachers and all who entered this contest from Gladstone, Eric Hamber, Windermere, and Sir Charles Tupper secondary schools in Vancouver.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present four different petitions this morning signed by citizens from across Canada. In the interest of public safety, they want tougher laws and the implementation of new mandatory minimum sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death. They also ask that the Criminal Code of Canada be changed to redefine the offence of impaired driving causing death as vehicular manslaughter.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House to table four petitions.

The petitions are with respect to the Algoma Central Railway passenger train. This petition came into place when the government withdrew its subsidy to Algoma Central Railway passenger service. The government has actually reinstated the funding for one more year, which has given some relief to the stakeholders, but they are continually concerned about the future.

The petitioners are calling for consultation. They are concerned about the economy of their communities, their health and safety, accessibility to the area, and the impact this has on businesses.

The petitioners are calling on the government to look at maintaining passenger rail across Canada.

The petitioners are from Richards Landing, Sault Ste. Marie, Hawk Junction, Windsor, Tiny, Wawa, Thornhill, Hornepayne, Blind River, Batchawana Bay, Echo Bay, and Elliot Lake.

● (1010)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table today.

The first petition is from my constituents in Kingston and the Islands regarding Bill C-18. The petitioners are worried about the right to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds. They are calling on Parliament to enshrine those rights in legislation.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my second petition comes to me not from my constituents but from people in rural eastern Ontario and the outskirts of Toronto. Perhaps they wish their voices to be heard in the House of Commons.

The petition is with regard to the so-called fair elections act. The petitioners are calling on the government to amend or withdraw the act, because it has not been amended sufficiently. They feel that there has not been proper consultation with elections experts.

[*Translation*]

VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of presenting a petition that condemns the lack of justice for children and women who are victims of violence. The petitioners are calling on the government to do more to protect them.

I would like to congratulate Aline Lafond from Maniwaki, who campaigned to get this petition signed. It is an important cause, and I am pleased to present this petition.

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition from a number of residents of my riding who are concerned about child prostitution and violence towards women having increased in countries where prostitution has been legalized.

The petitioners are asking Parliament to amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize the selling of sexual services, to criminalize the purchasing of sexual services, and to provide support for those who desire to leave prostitution.

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting two petitions that have been signed by people from my riding of Terrebonne—Blainville.

The first petition is about cuts to services at Canada Post. Those who signed the petition are particularly worried about the fact that home delivery is being cancelled. They are urging the government to reject Canada Post's plans to reduce services and to look at other options for modernizing the crown corporation's business model.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): The second petition I am presenting is calling for an end to unfair, excessive fees. This petition was also signed by people from my riding.

They are calling on the government to put an end to unfair fees, such as ATM fees, exorbitant rates charged by payday lenders and price-fixing at the pump. I am pleased to present these two petitions today.

[*English*]

DEMENTIA

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first petition is with regard to the need for a national strategy on dementia. As we know, across this country, a great many folks, specifically seniors, suffer from dementia. The petitioners are calling on the government, saying that a strategy is indeed needed on a national scale, not just at a provincial level. Although some provinces are tackling the issue, we need a national strategy.

CANADA POST

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by literally hundreds and hundreds of members of my riding and from across the Niagara Peninsula.

The petitioners are calling on the government to keep home mail delivery. Canada Post is an essential service for many across this country, specifically folks in my riding who either have mobility issues, may be seniors, or may simply be folks who need to get that mail and are not able to get to those so-called community mailboxes that are going to be who knows where across this country, especially in downtown areas.

The petitioners are calling on the government to make sure that Canada Post continues home mail delivery into the future and actually enhances that service.

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to table yet another petition in regard to Canada's old age programs for pensions: OAS, GIS, and CPP. In particular, the petitioners ask the Prime Minister to recognize the importance of allowing Canadians to continue to be able to retire at age 65 and to collect their pensions. They are in great opposition to the increase in the retirement from age 65 to 67. Yet again, this is likely the most popular petition I receive from my constituents, and I provide it today for the Prime Minister and the government.

● (1015)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, a terrible tragedy happened in London, Ontario last fall. Very clearly, the number of petitions I have received indicate how very deeply this cut into the community. It has to do with the loss of a family of three who were waiting for landed immigrant status. The community is concerned that public service jobs have reduced staffing levels to the point that people wait inordinate amounts of time for citizenship and landed status.

The petitioners call on the government to ensure that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is properly staffed and resourced in order to reach decisions on applications in a fair and timely manner and that all immigration officers consider factors with regard to humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to present two petitions. The first is from residents within Saanich—Gulf Islands from Pender Island, Brentwood Bay, North Saanich, Sydney, and throughout the riding. They call on this administration to cease its pursuit of the Canada-China investment treaty and to refuse to ratify it at the cabinet table. This is a treaty that, as the petitioners point out, presents significant threats to Canadian sovereignty because of the inability to leave the Canada-China investment treaty in less than 36 years should it ever be ratified.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes from residents of Brampton, Kingston, and Caledon. I am grateful for their support for the private member's bill that will be going to the health committee this week, Bill C-442, my private member's bill on a national Lyme disease strategy. I am very grateful to all members of the House for their support and for this petition.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions in the House today signed by residents in and around my riding of Beaches—East York. The first calls upon Parliament to refrain from making any changes to the Seeds Act or to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act through Bill C-18 and further to enshrine in legislation the inalienable rights of farmers and other Canadians to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa to allow proper review of the impact on farmers in Canada.

BLOOD AND ORGAN DONATION

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition under Standing Order 36. Petitioners request that sexual preferences of people not be an instant refusal of the right to donate. They request that the Government of Canada return the right of any healthy Canadian to give the gift of blood, bone marrow, and organs to those in need, no matter the race, religion, or sexual preference of a person. The right to give blood or donate organs is universal to any healthy man or woman.

DEMENTIA

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning I have the honour to present petitions on behalf of people from all over the greater Toronto area who draw the attention of the Minister of Health and the House of Commons to the fact that the federal government needs a national strategy for dementia and the health care of persons afflicted with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia-related diseases.

The petitioners call for the passage of Bill C-356, an act respecting a national strategy for dementia. They outline multiple points, and I would like to read a few of them, if I may, Mr. Speaker.

They call for the initiation of discussions, within 30 days of the act coming into force, with the provincial and territorial ministers to develop a comprehensive national plan to address all aspects of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, ADRD. Furthermore, they ask for the encouragement of greater investment in ADRD research, discovery, and the development of treatment that would prevent, halt, or reverse ADRD.

[*Translation*]

OIL INDUSTRY

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have here a petition that was signed by about 30 of my constituents. They want the government to stop giving $1.3 billion in subsidies to the oil industry every year. They want the Prime Minister to follow through on the commitment he made at the G20 in 2009 to phase out the subsidies.

The petitioners point out that the subsidies are incentives for energy sources that produce high levels of greenhouse gas emissions and discourage investments in green and renewable solutions.

They are asking the Prime Minister to stop giving billions of dollars to oil companies and start investing in a sustainable economy.

● (1020)

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS IN EGYPT

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present today an important petition about human rights relations in Egypt. People who signed this petition draw to the attention of the House the fact that the basic human rights, democratic freedoms, and the rule of law continue to be abused and repressed in Egypt.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Canadian government to condemn abuses of human rights in Egypt, urge Egyptian authorities to ensure that the basic human rights of all Egyptians are protected, regardless of partisan affiliation or personal beliefs, and demand that the rule of law and freedom of the press be observed and respected in all cases.

CANADA POST

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this petition is regarding the changes to Canada Post. The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to take the necessary legislative and regulatory steps to immediately reverse the implementation of the recently announced service rollbacks and cost increases proposed by Canada Post Corporation.

The petitioners further call upon the government to formally oppose any future steps to privatize Canada Post Corporation, its operation, or its services.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

PROTECTING CANADIANS FROM UNSAFE DRUGS ACT (VANESSA'S LAW)

The House resumed from March 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this bill, but to support sending it to committee. While this bill is a substantial improvement on the status quo, it has still taken the current government eight years, even though as Liberals we have pushed the government to change the way it regulates, the way it develops, and the way it looks at drug safety for Canadians.

However, the Conservatives have put the bill forward and there are some pieces of the bill that we like, but we think it falls short. There are other things we would like to see in this bill, and the minister herself has said in the House when she introduced the bill that she is open to amendments, so we are taking the minister at her word, and we are going to say we would like it to go to committee. We hope the minister will be true to her word and will look at our amendments then.

Here are some things we like about the bill.

We think that the minister getting the power to recall drugs is a very important piece that has been a long time coming. The minister has to be able to do so without first getting the manufacturer's approval. Before this, the minister had to get the manufacturer's approval to recall a drug or to say that a drug has severe side effects. The new language says that “If the Minister believes that a therapeutic product may present a serious risk of injury to human health...”. That is good language, and we support the minister getting those powers.

The minister used to have to overcome the reluctance of the companies to want to give that information. Now the minister would have the ability to compel industry to provide the information about the drugs that the minister wishes to either seek a notice of compliance on or that are actually out there in the public, and be able to recall them. This is all common sense, but it is crucial because nobody but the company itself knows the background of the clinical trials, of how the company formulated the drug and how that innovation occurred. Therefore it is important that the company is made to be forthcoming with some of that information.

What we also like about this bill is that the minister would compel health care providers and pharmacists to mandatorially report at-risk drug reactions. As a physician, I can say that was a difficult thing to do because it meant that physicians, after a whole busy day of seeing patients, at the end of the day then had to report all these things. It can take sometimes two hours out of their day. Now that the minister would provide an electronic means by which this could be easily done, it would make it much easier for physicians to comply with this.

The minister's ability to enforce conditions on market authorization and to compel changes to product labels is also very important, and the ability to move that forward would ensure patient safety. We think that is important, but we also want the minister not to do so in a hurry so that it would stop due diligence in terms of the ability to get the kind of information we need.

The fines of up to $5 million a day for the failure to remove a drug or the failure to obey the enforcement measures by the minister is also a very positive area.

Members will notice that we are saying that there are some very positive things about this bill. However, before this bill came about, I was writing a bill on this very same thing because we got a little tired of waiting for the government to do this after eight years; so I had some round-table meetings with experts on the issue. Here are some of the major elements that these experts feel are missing from the bill, which would make the bill stronger: better implementation of the ability to ensure patient safety, to ensure that there are appropriate regulations, and to ensure pre- and post-market surveillance of drugs.

This is about the precautionary principle, which should give the minister the power to ensure that the first and foremost thing she or he is concerned about, wherever possible, is being sure that on reasonable grounds, to prevent potential injury to a person or a citizen, the minister has that power to recall or remove a drug or not allow for notice of compliance. “Reasonable grounds” is sufficient. The minister should be protected for her ability to do this, using the term “reasonable grounds”. The minister's power should not just be limited to those who sell the drugs, because we know that in some areas the people who manufacture the drugs are not the people who sell the drugs.

● (1025)

They have different production arms and different distribution arms that distribute their drugs under different names. Therefore, it is important for the minister to look at the whole chain of distribution not merely at the manufacturer when recalling a drug.

Right now I think that the definitive issue of injury or harm is up for interpretation. For instance, let us look at the birth control drugs that did not work recently. No one felt that this was an important reason not to allow the drug a notice of compliance or to recall it, because they felt that if women became pregnant when using a contraceptive that did not work, it was not an adverse reaction and it did not cause severe injury or harm, because pregnancy is a lifestyle choice. I think that was a bending of the interpretation of what harm is. If women are taking a contraceptive, it is because they do not want to get pregnant. If they get pregnant, that is an adverse reaction. I think the ability to define what is injury or harm should be more clearly spelled out for two reasons: one, to protect the patient; and, two, to protect the minister from any kind of reaction from the company because it is clear what she means and what the legislation means by injury or harm. That should be clearly spelled out. It should be based not on subjective but on objective criteria that are in keeping with what we know about risks and harms pertaining to drugs. That would provide the minister protection and give her broader powers.

As well, we know that we cannot tell the adverse effects of a drug purely from the clinical trials. When a drug is undergoing clinical trials, it is done with a cohort of people who have been chosen, and out of that cohort it can be decided what the negative and adverse reactions are to the drug. However, when the drug goes out into the main community, into the citizenry at large and the general public, individual reactions to drugs can differ. While people may not have had reactions during the clinical trial, others in the main community may show adverse reactions. Therefore, the minister must have the ability to say that, although the government gave the drug a notice of compliance, due to the new reporting requirements for physicians and pharmacists it has noticed that after a year or six months there are adverse reactions that were not intended and did not show up in the clinical trials and that the drug will be recalled temporarily while we check on these. Then, ensuring that the precautionary principle is in place, the government can look at the drug and either put it back on the market if changes have been made or permanently recall it before it does any further harm.

To clearly define what we are doing is in the best interests of the minister. It would protect her from any kind of legal suit and so forth. That is an important piece we would like to see included.

The Auditor General has spoken on many an occasion about the lack of transparency in Health Canada's decision-making process. For instance, Health Canada publishes only very limited information on drugs and high-risk medical devices for which a notice of compliance is applied for. However, it does not tell us why it did not allow a drug a notice of compliance. It does not tell us what its opinions are about the drug, even though it may give it a notice of compliance and say that it is generally safe. There may be other clinicians who have said there are some concerns about the drug. Health Canada should put that out there to the public, so that pharmacists, prescribers, and patients would know that there could be some conditions under which the drug was allowed to go out there. There may be some potential negative effects with which the minister and the department are concerned, but they are releasing the drug anyway. That was in the bill when it was put forward as Bill C-51. I noticed it has been removed. I wonder why, because it was a very good piece in that legislation that we agreed on and that the Auditor General wanted to happen. That enhances the transparency of Health Canada in terms of its regulations and looking at drug safety.

We cannot afford to use the fact that the manufacturer does not want us to give out trade secrets. We do not have to give out trade secrets when we are saying that we think there may or may not be a problem that we have in the back of our mind even though we have put the drug out there. It is an important thing to do. Europe is doing it. The European drug agency is putting out what the negative opinions are on a particular drug, even though it felt that the benefits outweighed the risks and that is why it put it forward.

● (1030)

There should be a legal requirement to register clinical trial data. This should be open to physicians, patients, and pharmacists so that they are able to know what clinical trial data shows. Now, I know that the government thinks that would let out trade secrets. However, the European drug agency is doing this.

The clinical data that is put out in terms of the clinical trial does not have to disclose proprietary issues regarding the drug itself or its trade secrets. It is about the ability to ensure patient safety, which is foremost in the mind of Health Canada, as it should be. Therefore, to release the full report of pre- and post-clinical trials and surveillance on an ongoing basis is an absolute necessity, but it is not in the bill. Not only is the European drug agency doing this, it is thinking of expanding it to bring in anonymous or non-nominal general patient responses to the drugs so that, again, there is full knowledge and full disclosure. Also, the FDA has just tabled its intention of doing the same thing.

Canada is way behind both Europe and the United States in terms of looking at patient safety, in terms of full disclosure, and in terms of acquiring full disclosure by the manufacturers, who do not seem to be worried about the proprietary issues of trade secrets because they know what to put in and what not to. Clinical information is not a proprietary trade secret. The formula of the drug and how the innovation occurred are proprietary trade secrets, but not clinical trials or data about them.

It is important for the minister to strengthen the bill by doing this and to do everything under the rubric of good independent research, and not just the companies' research. There should be an independent body that looks at those clinical trials, and not just Health Canada. Again, Europe is doing that, and the FDA has tabled its intention to do that. It has to be done in the name of public safety and good evidence-based information.

We would like to see more transparency from Health Canada on why it gives a drug a notice of compliance and why it does not. What are the reasons? Again, we need to know that about certain drugs. People read about drugs, and when they find out that other countries use certain drugs, they wonder why Canadians cannot get it. They want to know why they are not allowed access to drugs that could save their lives, et cetera.

Good information helps people understand why certain decisions are made. However, right now we do not know anything about why Health Canada approves a particular drug or not, why certain drugs are suspended, and why some drugs remain on the market in spite of adverse reactions in other countries. These are some things that we feel would strengthen the bill.

Disclosure in the name of public safety is always very good. We need to ensure that the first thing in the mind of Health Canada when it approves a drug, or not, is that people can trust Health Canada to make good decisions in their best interest, and be able to do so in an objective and clinical evidence-based response. I think that right now Health Canada faces a great deal of mistrust from the public and drug prescribers because it is not transparent in some of these things.

Why would the bill allow government and cabinet to impose stringent rules favouring data protection of manufacturers under the Food and Drugs Act? We do not think that should be able to stand alone.

We have seen issues where people have asked for drugs, but the government has said that the Food and Drugs Act is the reason it is not doing certain things. However, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled very clearly that the issues of right to life, liberty, and the security of the person trump any piece of legislation, which is under section 7 of the charter. Patient safety should be foremost in anything that the bill would bring forward.

We oppose the amendment to the Food and Drugs Act in the bill to protect manufacturers' data. It should only be for proprietary data protection and not for anything else. The government should be protecting the patient, and Canadians.

The Liberal Party thinks that the bill is long overdue. There are some good points in Bill C-17 that move forward, with some steps we approve of, to enhance patient safety and knowledge of drugs for therapeutic prescribers.

● (1035)

The minister said that the bill should be open to amendments. We have, as I said just now, about five amendments we would like to see that would strengthen the bill. We approve of big chunks of the bill, and we would like to see the bill go to committee. We hope that the minister will be true to her word and allow for amendments to come forward so that the bill can go to the House and be accepted by all of us unanimously, because it is in the best interest of patient safety.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that this legislation is actually a good first step towards a comprehensive plan. There have been many calls from health professionals and advocates. The bill will finally grant the Minister of Health the necessary power to pull unsafe drugs from the market and ensure better labelling and possible adverse effects of drugs.

We have to remember that in 2011 the Auditor General warned that consumers are not receiving safety warnings about pharmaceutical drugs fast enough because Health Canada is slow to act on potential issues that it identifies.

New Democrats feel we need optimal prescribing practices. We want to make sure that Canadians are prescribed the most appropriate medication, that they know the medication they are taking is safe, that it is necessary, that it is prescribed the right way for the problem, and that negative side effects and drug interactions are avoided where possible. Every Canadians wants to make sure of that, but there have been situations where that has not been the case.

The Liberals had 13 years to do something on this when they were in power, and they failed to act. Does my colleague believe that Health Canada should increase the resources of the Common Drug Review, so that it can expand its work in evaluating the cost and effectiveness of prescription drugs? I think that would be a move in the right direction. Can she let me know whether or not she agrees with that?

● (1040)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a good one.

One of the reasons we see such a delay, as the Auditor General pointed out, in telling adverse effects is because there are insufficient resources, but also because there was not any mandatory adverse drug reporting by physicians and pharmacists. The bill will go a long way to do that.

However, as the member heard, it is really important that the government be able to implement the elements of the bill when it is put forward and it has the resources to do so, and that it has some sort of independent advisory group that can look with a very clinical and objective eye at the drugs coming out, look at the clinical trials and say whether that drug is appropriate, whether it is needed, and whether its benefits outweigh the risks. There is no drug without a risk, not a single drug I know of that does not have a risk. It has to be benefit versus risk, but resources would go a long way to ensuring that all of this is done.

If we do not have resources, we see the same delays the Auditor General talked about. It is almost a year sometimes in getting some of that information out to the patient and the prescriber.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is very knowledgeable about health care in general and recognizes the importance of pharmaceuticals that are affordable and safe. We try to ensure that patients receive the type of pharmaceuticals, prescription medications they need, but cost is becoming more and more of an issue.

Could the member comment on the ever-increasing cost of prescription drugs in Canada?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, having a drug is one thing but the ability for people to access the drug is another.

Recent studies have shown that one in five patients with a chronic illness is not able to afford prescriptions so the medication is taken sporadically, which means that the medication is not doing the good it should do. People are getting sicker. When they go into a hospital this increases hospital costs and acute care for the patient. The ability to afford prescriptions is an important factor.

Canada is the only country in the industrialized world with a universal health care system that does not have a universal pharmaceutical strategy. One of the core objectives in the 2004 accord was to look at a national pharmaceutical strategy. The government, in its wisdom or lack thereof, completely ignored that in 2006. What we now have is one of the most costly and non-accessible pharmaceutical systems in the world.

We should be looking at what other countries are doing. New Zealand, for example, has a system whereby when the government buys a drug for a formulary, the cost is so much lower than the cost in Canada. We are paying the second-highest cost for drugs in the world. This is really ridiculous.

We need to look at a good pharmaceutical strategy. If we had the United Kingdom's national pharmaceutical strategy, we could save $14 billion a year. If we had the New Zealand pharmaceutical strategy, we could save more than that. That money could be put into the health care system in terms of health promotion and disease prevention, palliative care, mental health, all of the pieces that are missing right now.

It is like being penny-wise and pound foolish. I do not understand why the government has not let that happen and has let it lag.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I am sure she is very knowledgeable about many health-related issues.

As she probably knows, in his 2011 report, the Auditor General pointed to problems with Health Canada's timelines for informing people about problems with drugs. Up to two years can go by before Health Canada even finds out about problems.

The report was released in 2011, but it was not until December 2013 that the government introduced this bill, which is a step in the right direction. As my colleague said, Bill C-17 was a long time coming. However, I wonder why previous Liberal governments did not tackle this problem when they had the chance.

Were they not aware of the problem? Can my colleague enlighten me?

● (1045)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The system was not as bogged down when the Liberals were in power as it is currently. The system now takes a long time to move. It takes a long time to get notice of compliance to approve drugs. It takes a long time to get out adverse reporting and that is because the government has severely cut back on the resources needed to move it forward. It has been shown that by voluntarily asking manufacturers to okay whether a drug can be recalled or whether various restrictions can be put on a drug, industry has to agree and that takes a long time.

We have learned certain things over the years. One can go back as far as the 1920s and ask why certain things were not done then. Body of knowledge information, what other countries are doing, best practices, allow us now to see where we should be going.

We should be making the strong changes that are in this legislation and we should be adding the ones that would make it stronger. We need to ensure resources are available to do so.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember when OxyContin was first prescribed in Ontario. At the time it was supposed to be a miracle drug because it was not supposed to be addictive. We found that it was heavily over-prescribed, leading to all manner of problems in the general community. In my region, people who would never become addicted to opiates or that were given OxyContin without explanation of the effects. It raises the question of optimal prescribing practices and the need to work with the medical community to ensure that when doctors are given new medicines on the market that the issue of side effects and the implications of those drugs are properly explained.

The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health currently operates the optimal use program. It produces clinical guidelines and disseminates them to physicians, but it seems that there is an insufficient relationship between the impact of drugs and how this is being explained to physicians.

Given my hon. colleague's experience in the medical community, what does she think we need to do to ensure that when drugs are brought onto the market the issue of side effects and implications of those drugs are properly given to physicians on the front line?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. It shows why this bill is important and why some of the measures have talked about to strengthen the bill would make this bill different.

For starters, when a drug goes through clinical trials before it gets to Health Canada and gets a notice of compliance, all of that information is kept absolutely secret. No one knows about it. Physicians are not warned. Pharmacists are not warned. Nobody knows how the clinical trials went, what the reasons were for accepting the drug, or what the problems were with the drug.

That is what we are asking for. They are doing it in Europe, and the FDA has now tabled its desire to do that and has put it forward.

At the same time, clinical trials are limited, in that they only go to a certain cohort of people. When the drug hits the general public, adverse reactions and risk factors, as in the case of OxyContin, do not come forward until it has been in the marketplace for some time. It is then that we suddenly find that people are finding very specific uses for it out there.

Every single opiate is addictive, and so was OxyContin. Everyone knew that, but the fact that people could take OxyContin and syringe it and add various things to it and inject it was not known in the clinical trials because they were not doing it in the clinical trials. That is another reason we want complete surveillance of drugs. It is to provide a warning, over the course of time, as to what the new adverse effects are.

It therefore blows my mind, knowing all of this, that the government would approve the generic production of OxyContin to six different generic companies within the last year, knowing what it now knows about OxyContin and having been asked not to do it.

● (1050)

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-17, which proposes to amend the Food and Drugs Act to better protect Canadians from potentially dangerous and unsafe drugs.

Over the past three years I have served on the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations and have come to appreciate first-hand the importance of regularly reviewing and carefully scrutinizing regulations in our legislation. Often the results can be quite surprising when reviewing regulations, and that is certainly apparent in the Food and Drugs Act. In my view, that is why the amendments proposed in Bill C-17 are extremely important to Canadians.

I would like to highlight this with an example. Under the current act, if a drug or medical device poses an unacceptable risk to patient health, only the drug and medical device manufacturers can initiate a recall, and that is only after they become aware that a risk exists. In other words, under our existing laws, it is up to the manufacturers to determine whether or not there is a health risk serious enough to warrant a recall. Health Canada plays a secondary role. The current law only requires a manufacturer to notify Health Canada of the manufacturer's decision to issue a recall after the fact.

However, it does not end there. Under our current laws, government cannot step in and order a manufacturer to recall a drug or medical device that is unsafe. Where our existing law becomes more bizarre is that if something like a candy bar is deemed unsafe to the public, the Minister of Health can issue a recall. To summarize, the Minister of Health can issue recalls for dangerous and unsafe foods, but not for dangerous and unsafe drugs. In my view, this situation is completely unacceptable.

Bill C-17 proposes to remedy this situation by ensuring that the Minister of Health has mandatory recall power to compel a manufacturer to recall a drug or medical device if it is determined that it presents a serious or imminent risk of injury to health. This authority provides government with the power to initiate a recall instead of leaving the decision to the manufacturer or requiring Health Canada to negotiate with industry when the health and safety of Canadians is at stake.

I should also add that under this recall provision, once a recall is ordered, anyone who sells a drug or medical device and is aware that the product has been subject to recall may be convicted of an offence. There is also a provision for an exemption to this penalty, an exemption that allows for Health Canada to have the flexibility to authorize the sale of a recalled product with our without condition. Why does that make sense? It is because it is conceivable that in some circumstances a patient may have unique medical needs for which no alternative to a recalled drug is available.

I should also point out that under the new recall measures there would be no changes that would limit a manufacturer's ability to issue a voluntary recall. However, if a manufacturer fails to act quickly and decisively, the Minister of Health would have new powers to better protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Recently I met with a constituent who shared with me the importance of quality control in diabetes testing strips. How much insulin to take is determined by these strips, and serious failure in these test strips could result in death. The need for increased protection for Canadians in this area, and many others, is important, and that is why I will be supporting the bill. The health and safety of Canadian families must absolutely come first, and serious risks at the manufacturing level have to be treated seriously.

While researching the bill late last evening, I was struck deeply when I came across the number of Canadian families that have suffered the loss of a loved one as a result of a dangerous drug. Indeed, a colleague of ours in this place knows all too well the serious need for Bill C-17. In fact, the more I researched this area, the more apparent it became of the need for Bill C-17 to become law.

● (1055)

In my view, this bill is long overdue. It is simply not acceptable that drugs that could pose a risk to patients remain on the market at the arbitrary discretion of the manufacturer.

To give some further perspective on how out of date these current regulations are, fines under the act are $5,000, while under Bill C-17 these fines can be increased to up to $5 million a day. Even jail time can be imposed under very serious circumstances. These are protections, I would argue, that Canadians need.

Before I close, here is some brief history I also believe is relevant and that I am sure many members of this House would appreciate hearing. Canada's Food and Drugs Act was first passed in 1920. Significant changes were made in 1947. Further changes were made in the 1960s, after a dangerous drug that was legal at the time resulted in the death and deformation of thousands of infant children.

I believe that Bill C-17, which amends the Food and Drugs Act, is long overdue. Protecting Canadians from unsafe therapeutic products without delay or administrative red tape is a priority that I believe all members of this place should share.

I would also note that the Minister of Health has stated that she would be open to amendments to Bill C-17 if ideas are brought forward that would better protect Canadian patients.

From a regulatory perspective, the mandatory recall measures proposed in this bill are consistent with mandatory recall measures for therapeutic products in other countries, including the United States and the European Union.

I submit that it is time that Canada joined the list of countries with mandatory recall legislation, and I ask that all members of this House join me in supporting Bill C-17. I thank all members for taking the time to hear my thoughts on this piece of legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the text of this proposed legislation is important, but so is enforcement. Unfortunately, Canada has one great weakness: it passes bills but does nothing to enforce them. Just yesterday, we talked about rail safety issues with the distinguished member. In theory, there is a law that protects Canadians, but the Auditor General discovered that the law is not enforced. There is no real oversight, just a smokescreen.

The member indicated that the minister is open to amendments to improve what is a necessary and useful bill. My question for my distinguished colleague is this: will measures also be taken to enforce this law on the ground? Passing a bill without doing anything to enforce compliance is pointless. What guarantees can my distinguished colleague offer about the idea behind this excellent bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I worked with the member opposite on the public accounts committee and always enjoy his joining in the debate.

First of all, this is at second reading. I believe we should swiftly send this piece of legislation to the committee so that we can have a thorough examination. Then if members have ideas about how to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of this legislation, I am sure the committee would be happy to hear them.

Specific to the member's concern about not being able to get the job done, as I said in my speech, it is important that Health Canada, through the Minister of Health, have the ability to compel recalls in a safe and effective manner. This legislation will do that.

I would hope that the member would recognize that and not only support the bill's referral to committee so that we can have it studied but also support it at third reading so that we can have this measure in place and give the tools to Health Canada to protect the health and safety of Canadians, as I am sure this member, and every single member of this place, wants to see happen.

● (1100)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member listened to what the Liberal Party's critic had to say on the legislation. We see the benefits of having the bill go to committee. The Liberal Party has suggested, in a very tangible way, a number of amendments that need to be made to the legislation to improve it.

To what degree does the member believe the government will listen to opposition members, in particular individuals like the Liberal Party's health critic, who is exceptionally knowledgeable about the issue and wants to improve the legislation?

We recognize there is benefit, and we want to see the legislation go to committee.

Does the member equally recognize the benefit of improving the legislation through amendments, even if they come through the opposition?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, first, I served on the justice committee, one of the committees I quite enjoyed working on, when it considered the not criminally responsible legislation. We actually took amendments from both the New Democrats and the Liberals where they made sense.

If we can all agree that this is good legislation, a good first step, as one member said, is to take it to committee and put forward common sense amendments that would improve the bill. I am sure they would be looked at and, hopefully, supported. We all want the health and safety of Canadians to be first and foremost.

On his other point about whether we will listen to the health critic, I am sure the health committee will say that it listens to the health critic all the time.

However, by the same token, many of the provisions she mentioned in her speech, I believe, exceed the actual bill's scope. Some of those ideas may be perfectly appropriate and some of them may be ruled out of order. We will let the committee process go forward and find out which amendments can be tabled and are in order. Then the committee can examine and articulate which suggestions should go forward and which ones should remain on the table.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure for me today to stand to support and talk to the House about Vanessa's law.

As my colleague from Okanagan—Coquihalla mentioned, this bill requires the reporting of serious adverse drug reactions to ensure that doctors and patients are aware of new risks, and introduces new tough fines for companies that put Canadians at risk. I encourage all members to support the bill's referral to committee so some progress can made on the important issue of drug safety and work toward better protections for Canadian patients.

I will focus my remarks on the importance of mandatory reporting of serious adverse drug reactions and also medical device incidents by health care institutions and how this would improve our ability to respond to safety issues that would help keep Canadians safe.

As members of the House can appreciate, drugs can not only have beneficial effects for patients, but can sometimes have unintended and unwanted side effects. These side effects, better known as adverse drug reactions, can sometimes represent very serious medical risks. What are termed serious adverse drug reactions in the bill are ones that require hospitalization and are often life threatening or result in permanent disability.

Adverse reactions to medications are estimated to amount up to 25% of emergency room visits and hospital admissions, an amazing number that would likely shock most of us. That is why I find it so appropriate that the bill has been entitled Vanessa's law, in memory of the member for Oakville's late daughter, who tragically died of a heart attack while on prescription drugs that were later deemed not safe and then removed from the market.

The bill would make it a requirement for certain health care institutions to provide Health Canada with serious adverse drug reactions or medical device incidents. This information would allow Health Canada to take steps to prevent further harm related to these products. As I mentioned, although a significant number of Canadians are admitted to hospitals each year for serious drug reactions, again 25%, this important information about drugs and medical devices does not always reach Health Canada. This is a serious concern and one that legislators can actually help address.

Our country has one of the most rigorous drug approval systems in the world. Before a drug reaches the marketplace, the department reviews it for safety, quality and effectiveness. This review is generally based on scientific data that is attained through previous studies and observed in clinical testing.

Clinical testing is an important part in the development of drugs and medical devices, and we have every reason to have the confidence in the science. However, studying drugs before they are put on the market cannot tell us everything about these products. When a drug or medical device is introduced to the real world, it may produce different results from those that were observed in a controlled clinical trial setting. In fact, some serious issues may only become known after a medical device or drug is actually on the market.

It is therefore critical that we continue to monitor the use of drugs and medical devices in the marketplace and that information on serious adverse reactions are reported to Health Canada in a timely manner. Under current law, and this is interesting, only manufacturers and sponsors of clinical trials must report serious adverse reactions. However, they do not receive reports on some of the serious adverse reactions and cannot report incidents to the department if they do not know about them.

● (1105)

I will give credit where credit is due. Adverse drug reactions reported to Health Canada have been on the rise over the past five years. Unfortunately, despite these improvements, it is estimated that less than 10% of adverse drug reactions are actually reported. This underreporting of important safety information is a serious concern as it limits Health Canada's ability to identify at an early stage the potential safety issues with a product and to take timely action to prevent additional patient harm.

Some positive steps have already been taken to address under-reporting by educating health care professionals on the value of reporting and how to properly report to Health Canada. Pre-emptive steps have also been taken to introduce new simplified forms and electronic forms to report. Devoting health care resources needlessly to an overly complex system creates a problem in itself and nipping this in the bud is simply good policy. In addition, Health Canada has worked with standard-setting bodies such as Accreditation Canada to assist health care institutions to standardize their process for reporting. Although this has helped, it is still not enough. We need to do better.

With Vanessa's Law, we will strengthen serious adverse drug reaction and medical device incident reporting, as well as provide the tools needed to respond to unsafe drugs.

Let me give a few examples to illustrate how this safety information can benefit patients and how the bill would support these measures.

When Health Canada receives important information about a certain medical device or drug, it will take the necessary steps to prevent future harm. Health Canada could alert health care professionals to any new harms and how they could be mitigated, or require the manufacturer to change the labelling to add a warning.

We know that many serious adverse drug reactions are preventable. Taking action to prevent these harms will free up valuable hospital resources, through addressing threats to health and safety before hospitalization is required.

As alluded to earlier, we are well aware of how busy health care institutions have become and we do not intend to impose any unnecessary burden on an already strained health care system. That is why we are strongly committed to further consultations with health care institutions, as well as with provincial and territorial governments.

There is a clear commitment in the bill to developing regulations that will set out what information is required, how it is reported and which health care institutions will be required to report.

Only those health care institutions that are best positioned to improve the quantity and quality of reporting would be required to report. Only useful safety information about a drug or medical device will be gathered in ways that are efficient and within time frames that are meaningful. Again, all with a view to ensure the least burdensome way to get the safety information that is needed.

Further, it is an expressed commitment in the bill that reported requirements will take into account existing information management systems with the view to not imposing any unnecessary administrative burden. This will lead to the development of a meaningful reporting system that is not only focused on increasing the quantity of data, but also in gathering quality data.

It is important for Health Canada to continue to monitor drugs and medical devices once they are on the market. The information that health care institutions will provide on serious adverse drug reactions will allow Health Canada to assess the balance between the benefits and the risks of a drug while it is on the market. More important, it will support timely identification of safety issues and early action to prevent future harm.

Our government's priority is the health and safety of Canadians families. Strengthening the reporting requirements for drugs and medical devices will better protect Canadians and their families from preventable harm.

These important measures need to be taken, and I hope Vanessa's Law will receive support from all parties so that all of us as a country can take action for better protection of Canadians.

I am thankful for the time allotted for me to speak to such an important bill and I look forward to questions.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Although we support the bill, we are nevertheless disappointed that it was introduced such a long time after the problems were flagged.

I believe my colleague is aware of the 2011 Auditor General's report. After all, we were both members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and he knows as well as I do that the Auditor General had deplored the time lag in disclosing information about the safety of drugs.

Does my colleague know what caused this time lag? In his opinion, why has it taken the government so long to take action in this important matter?

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the other side for his question. We have spent time together on public accounts. When we receive the Auditor General's reports, we as a government and as a Parliament make our best efforts to improve what we may think is best for Canadians when we are going through a process or legislation.

In this particular case, we have now got an incredible bill in front of us, put forward by the member for Oakville. It is not only about his family. We all heard the speech he gave in support of this bill. What this bill would do is relate back to our communities and our families about the significance of making, in this case, some very significant changes for the protection of Canadians.

It would provide the monitoring and the ability to take products that may be harmful to us and get the labelling changed. It would introduce monitoring, so we could actually provide assurance that the medications we are taking are safe.

It is not only for adults. We know, in this particular case, that although the product may have been good for an adult, it had some very serious adverse effects for a young person.

To answer my colleague's question, we are moving ahead and we are moving ahead quickly. We want to get this bill into committee, so that if there are changes and, as the Minister of Health has said, if there are good amendments that make sense in moving this forward for the protection of Canadians, we will make them.

I look forward to the support of this bill as we move forward.

● (1115)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on one of the comments that the member made when he talked about medications and drugs and the benefits versus the risks. It is critically important that we recognize that, when we have these prescription drugs, quite often there is this mindset that they are good for us and that, at the end of the day, no one is going to die from them or have negative side effects to the degree in which they prevail in society today.

That is why education is a very important aspect when it comes to medications. Along with that education, we have to have the information. We have to know the impact that these medications have, as a general rule. This is where there has been a great shortfall.

I wonder if the member would like to pick up on that particular point, which is the need not only that we have the information, but that the information be passed on through education in order to prevent people in the future from dying or falling quite ill as a result of getting prescription drugs that they should not have been taking.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, because what he talked about is real life. One of the key issues of that question is that the education process is needed.

The other part of it is reporting when there are adverse effects. Right now, basically, the manufacturer and the sponsor are the only ones that are required to do the reporting. When we have medical professionals who acknowledge and see adverse effects that are happening to a patient, they would now have to do that reporting. That is going to be part of the education, at least at the professional level.

The labelling is going to help. We need to make sure that the labelling is also in an educational format, so that families can understand it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Churchill.

I would also like to take the time to acknowledge the courage of my colleague from Oakville, with whom I had the opportunity to work in committee. To my mind, the fact that he took the time to share his experience is not only very moving, but also very important. Personal experience plays an important role in our efforts to make progress on such a file. It goes beyond politics.

As my colleagues said, the NDP will support the bill at second reading. We recognize that it is a step in the right direction. In fact, a number of my colleagues said so this morning. We also recognize that it is important to send this bill to committee in order to hear from certain witnesses who may not have been adequately consulted. I am thinking of the Canadian Nurses Association, among others, which says that the front-line workers who face medical challenges in communities were not sufficiently consulted. It will be a good opportunity for us to hear what these people have to say and perhaps to propose amendments.

It must be said, unfortunately, that we have been waiting for this for a very long time. The introduction of this bill has been delayed a bit. As I was saying earlier, when I asked my colleague a question in 2011, I was on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We were studying the Auditor General's report, which raised the problem of drug safety and the fact that the time between Health Canada receiving the information and sharing it with the public takes too long. In some cases it took two years, which is far too long.

I remember some of the testimony we heard. There did not seem to be a very clear commitment from the government at that time. Nonetheless, we have to look on the bright side. It is better late than never. The bill has been introduced and we believe it is a step in the right direction. We have to acknowledge that.

In this matter, we have to address a number of aspects having to do with drug safety. We will talk about it further. This is an extremely important issue. In the case of food safety, there were some explosive issues, such as the XL Foods recall, for example. This issue has a direct impact on the daily safety of thousands of people in Canada.

When it comes to food and drugs, we want to make sure that people can look after their health safely. People take drugs to feel better, not to end up with more problems. It is very important to ensure that companies can be required to recall their ineffective drugs. We must also ensure that information is shared. That is very important. What we noticed, and continue to notice, is that there is an issue with transparency and the sharing of information.

For example, one suggestion that the NDP made with regard to this issue and this bill relates to the public disclosure of the results of clinical trials. We know that information is not always being made public or shared with Canadians. I think that is a major problem, given that people often do not know anything about the drugs they are taking. They just go to the doctor and get a prescription. They rely on the doctor's expertise and the often very basic information they may have.

● (1120)

This is even more important today because, with all the information that is available on the Internet, many people may try to find the information themselves. If the government gave them information from reliable sources such as the department, it could be very reassuring for them. Canadians would know that the information provided by the government was reliable, accurate and complete. There is still a lot of work to be done in this regard.

Speaking of information and transparency, this also relates to food safety. I do not really like to make this comparison, since we are talking about two different issues, but they are similar in that the government and the minister need to take some responsibility. For example, with respect to the XL Foods recall, the Americans were the ones who discovered the problem. This bill contains an extremely important element in this regard: it ensures that the minister can issue a recall even when the negative effects of the drug are discovered outside Canada.

The information sent to the United States or Europe, for example, shows that many drugs are used throughout the world. We must not limit ourselves to our own experience. We must benefit from the knowledge of others.

Once again, this bill is a step in the right direction. It is becoming a recurring theme for the government to use information that was discovered, seen and recognized in other places to make important decisions regarding the safety of drugs in Canada.

The work of my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert also ties into this since she introduced Bill C-523, which deals with drug shortages. At first glance, drug shortages do not seem to have a direct impact on drug safety, but I would venture to say that they do.

It has to do with transparency and the dissemination of information. It is problematic when the public—and not just patients, but doctors as well—does not have full information about drug shortages, a problem that my colleague's bill aimed to fix, because other drugs are used, including some lesser-known ones that could pose certain risks. These drugs are used in emergencies but the individuals involved do not necessarily understand all of the side effects that can sometimes be negative.

We need to understand why it is important to make this improvement. I know that a government member could tell me that the Minister of Health showed some openness on this issue last week when she claimed she was prepared to look into drug shortages. However, our team and one of our NDP colleagues made a meaningful suggestion, and this suggestion could significantly improve Canada's entire pharmaceutical system.

The provincial governments are obviously responsible for ensuring that the health care system runs smoothly. People have a lot of concerns about drugs. They need to have good information and we need to ensure that our prescription system helps take care of Canadians and does not cause harmful side effects. The public is very concerned about this, and we must take measures such as the ones in this bill to protect the public.

Although we have some concerns and this bill has some flaws, all parties can agree that it is still a step in the right direction to improve our health care system. After all, our public health care system is one of the cornerstones of our society. Any step in the right direction to improve this system must be supported.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the members opposite for supporting Vanessa's law, Bill C-17, the protecting Canadians from unsafe drugs act. I want to give my sincere thanks to all the members who are supporting it.

I am pleased to tell the House that we have had really tremendous cross-party support. This is a non-partisan issue, of course. This legislation has received that support since it was introduced. In fact, the NDP health critic, the member for Vancouver East, issued a press release the day it was tabled and called it a step in the right direction, as the member opposite just did.

I was also happy to hear that the Minister of Health has heard support from the Liberal member for Malpeque, who urged the minister to secure passage of Bill C-17, Vanessa's law, which will strengthen the federal government's ability to provide oversight and to take action to assure the safety of drugs after they have been approved.

I want to thank that member for that support as well.

The cross-party support this bill has received is very encouraging, and I look forward to working with these members and others in securing its swift passage. To that point, I want to request that we please get this bill out of the House today. I am hoping it will be approved to go forward to the Standing Committee on Health, of which I am member.

If we do that quickly, we can get it to committee next week. It is my wish and my hope that this bill will be passed before the end of June in the House of Commons and sent to the Senate. This is important, because Canadians are suffering adverse drug reactions daily. If we hold up Vanessa's law, that will continue and will be more likely to continue throughout the summer. The publicity from this bill is making Canadians more aware of the risks of adverse drug reactions when taking prescription drugs.

I ask members to help get this bill out of here by noon today, get it to the Standing Committee on Health, and get it approved and sent to the Senate, for the safety of Canadians.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, we do indeed recognize the work of this member, but we also recognize the work of all the members and critics involved in this matter. Clearly, we recognize the urgency of the situation. We also recognize the importance of raising certain issues and making the necessary improvements in committee.

My colleague talked about the positive aspect of this bill receiving support from all parties. However, it is important to point out another positive aspect in that the government seems to be prepared to hear some amendments at committee stage.

Once again, let me congratulate the member for his courage to participate in this debate and to use his personal story. I agree with him that our health care system is one of the cornerstones of our identity and our society. We must ensure that the system works properly, especially when it comes to drugs. At the end of the day, those drugs intended to treat people must be safe.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged by the intervention by the Conservative member in regard to the bill. In essence, he has requested that we try to get this bill passed here this morning.

Given the assurances provided by government members, and particularly by this Conservative member, there is merit in concluding this bill before lunchtime. I would ask the member from the New Democratic Party if his party is prepared to allow it to pass before lunchtime. I suspect that we could get consensus to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I will not speak for my colleagues. Since I am sharing my time with my colleague from Churchill, perhaps others will want to comment on the issue and add their two cents' worth to the debate. It is not for me to stand in their way. That is their right as members of Parliament.

However, we do recognize the urgency of this matter, just like the members of the other parties. At the same time, I will leave it up to my colleagues who wish to speak to do so. We are also going to make every effort to work effectively in committee and ensure that the bill will be studied, in order to keep improving the situation.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to speak on Bill C-17, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act.

As has been stated in the House, we in the NDP are supporting the bill at second reading. We believe that Bill C-17 would bring several key improvements to current drug safety laws.

The bill would allow the government to recall drugs or order a distributor to take corrective action to remedy a problem with a drug. The health minister could order a manufacturer or importer to modify the label of a drug to update the side effects or health risks associated with it. The health minister could order a review of a drug and require a copy of the review. The bill would require manufacturers to update Canadian information on the risks associated with a drug, even if the safety risks were discovered in another country.

We believe that this bill is a good first step in protecting Canadians' health and in improving the gaps in current drug safety legislation. Most importantly, it would give the health minister the long-needed power to recall unsafe drugs and to require that drugs undergo further testing if they appear to pose a health risk.

However, we believe that this proposed legislation does not go far enough. We want to see more comprehensive drug safety planning that goes beyond the measures in the bill.

As I have acknowledged, Canada needs a comprehensive drug safety plan so that Canadians can be assured that their medications are safe for use. Canadians need to have access to plain-language information about why their medications are safe, including on testing processes and on medication labelling.

To give some background, we know that 150,000 Canadians annually experience serious reactions from prescription drugs. In 2013 alone we saw several major drug safety incidents, such as diluted chemotherapy drugs given to over 1,200 patients in Ontario and New Brunswick.

France banned the product Diane-35 in January 2013 after four French deaths were linked to the drug, but Health Canada has remained quiet and has refused any follow-up action to ensure that Canadians are aware of the risks. Off-label use of acne medication Diane-35 is linked to nine adverse reactions causing death in Canada.

Another example is drug-maker Apotex, which was sanctioned by the FDA due to concerns raised about quality control and repeated deficiencies at two of its Toronto area manufacturing facilities. Health Canada was apparently not concerned about the warnings, even though it had not inspected the facilities since 2011.

Finally, I and many of my colleagues have raised a drug incident with the minister, and I know that many Canadians have been concerned about this, particularly Canadian women.

For example, there have been voluntary recalls of high-profile drugs used to treat heart problems, high blood pressure, infections, and mental illness. However, I want to point to a particular concern, as I said, for Canadian women, which is the birth control pill Alysena-28 and five other popular birth control pills that were voluntarily recalled or had serious safety warnings issued about them: Diane-35, Yaz, Yazmin, Esme-28, and Freya-28.

Despite warning signs and the fact that many Canadian women were sharing on social media and with the mainstream media information about the deficiencies they were noticing and hearing about, the Conservative government was slow to act in terms of recalls.

We know that most risks associated with prescription drugs are identified after they are introduced to consumers. Almost one-fifth of new active substances approved by Health Canada between 1995 and 2010 were later given serious safety warnings. Despite this, Health Canada still does not require post-market drug studies.

We know that seniors are five times more likely to be hospitalized for adverse drug reactions. A recent study showed that one in 200 seniors are hospitalized for an adverse drug reaction versus one in 1,000 for other Canadians.

We know that seniors are often on more medications, and this demonstrates the need for a better evaluation and monitoring system to prevent adverse reactions.

We also heard from the Auditor General, who in 2011 reported on Health Canada's regulation of pharmaceutical drugs. The Auditor General at that time stated:

● (1135)

> The Department does not take timely action in its regulatory activities, with the exception of its review of two types of drug submissions. In particular, the Department is slow to assess potential safety issues. It can take more than two years to complete an assessment of potential safety issues and to provide Canadians with new safety information.

The Auditor General went on to raise various concerns when it comes to our regulation system.

When it comes to delays in terms of drugs that are necessary and have been proven to be very beneficial to people, I want to draw attention to the pill RU-486. Sadly, too many people have not familiarized themselves with the literature. It is an integral method in terms of reproductive choices, including medical abortion, that women have around the world in countries like the U.S. and 56 other countries. We know that Health Canada is taking too long in approving this pill. Despite the fact that it has been shown to be beneficial, we have yet to see an approval that would put Canada in the group of so many like-minded countries in making sure that women have access to medication they actually need.

We acknowledge that this is an important first step and a step in the right direction. However, we need the government to be far more proactive when it comes to drug safety and when it comes to recognizing the importance of making medication available to people.

I want to share one particular area where the federal government, sadly, is not showing leadership. It is in the cutbacks to medical coverage, including drug coverage, for first nations people. In fact, just yesterday, I met with the leaders from a first nation in Manitoba, Fisher River, and spoke with other first nations leaders who are very concerned about the cuts to non-insured health benefits, including drug coverage. It is a situation that is sadly putting more and more first nations people, including elders, in vulnerable situations, given that they are not able to access the kind of medical service and coverage they need to be the healthiest they can be. I am particularly concerned that this is affecting a population that we know lives disproportionately in poverty. They often have less access to medical services, such as the care of a doctor, or nurses, for that matter. I find it particularly troubling that the government, despite its commitment to moving forward when it comes to safe drug coverage, at the same time is cutting drug coverage for first nations people who would be covered under non-insured health benefits.

While we acknowledge that this is an important step, we also ask for leadership from the government when it comes to drug safety, drug coverage, and understanding that the federal government has a critical role to play in ensuring safety for the citizens of our country. Certainly we in the official opposition, the NDP, stand on the side of so many Canadians who are asking the federal government to finally take action.

● (1140)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague and the points she raised in this important discussion on ensuring that we have the protocols in place to protect health in dealing with drugs that are being put on the market.

One of the questions that has been raised is the importance of public disclosure of clinical trial results. Currently the results of many clinical trials are never published or made publicly available in Canada. There has been a move to have these reports, good or bad, put out there so that patients, physicians, and researchers have all the information they need to deal with new drugs being put on the market.

In 2005, the World Health Organization stated its support for the requirement to register clinical trials, to develop worldwide standards for trial registration, and to encourage sponsors to make their data public. I would like to ask my hon. colleague what she thinks about the importance of making the clinical trial information on the drugs being prepared available to the public.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, it is critical to take leadership on this front and to respond to the call of the global community when it comes to transparency and really supporting safety of clinical trials of drugs that Canadians would use. This is obviously very connected to the drug that I mentioned, RU486, where Health Canada has been notoriously cryptic. In fact, at first, it said it was not in trial and then it remembered it was and yet, there is no way for us to know at which stage it is and what these trials look like. All we do know is that 57 countries around the world see this drug as safe and beneficial to women in their country, particularly women in remote areas, yet in our country, our own health department is keeping this information from us, not just in connection with this drug but generally. It has not practised the kind of transparency we would need.

We hope that Bill C-17 would be just the first step of many that the government will take to ensure that we have a robust safety system when it comes to approving drugs and making it clear to Canadians what that process is, along the way.

● (1145)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's remarks and the fact that the official opposition will be voting in support of the bill, as will I. I certainly hope it will pass before we rise this summer, as the hon. member for Oakville has indicated he would like to see.

Would the hon. member for Churchill agree that perhaps at the close of our second reading debate today, we might be able to move for unanimous consent that the bill go straight to committee?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, as we have indicated, we are very much in support of the bill and have been from the beginning. I think it is important for us to be able to share our position and, certainly, our hopes for further steps that need to be taken in this same vein. I think that is an absolutely critical role that we have as parliamentarians. Certainly, I expect that many of us will share our support and share further steps as this debate goes forward. We certainly hope that we can bring this bill into law sooner rather than later.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to support Bill C-17, an act that would protect patients and indeed all Canadians from drugs that are approved and used as prescribed and yet can result in patient deaths.

It is rare in this place to have such unanimity around a bill put forward by the government. This important legislation would amend the Food and Drugs Act. The government has taken a courageous step. The Minister of Health should have the right to recall an unsafe drug. That has been obvious since 1962, when Canada's Parliament discovered that it needed a special act of Parliament to pull thalidomide off the shelves. For half a century we have continued in the same circumstance. The Minister of Health has no power to recall a drug when that drug is recognized as dangerous. It is quite astonishing. It is not because parliamentarians and various ministers of health have not frequently wondered why they lacked those powers but it is because of one thing and that is the unholy, somewhat criminal power, that pharmaceutical lobbies hold over governments around the world.

I will be supporting Bill C-17 but I will be suggesting some areas where it could be strengthened.

I would like to pay tribute to two people. The first is the Canadian Minister of Health. Even though this legislation could be much stronger, it took courage to bring it this far.

I have to pay tribute, as everyone has mentioned, to the member of Parliament for Oakville whose own personal story is now well known. This is Vanessa's law. This legislation is named for his daughter. There really are no words to express the depth of my admiration and gratitude to this individual member of Parliament.

The member's situation and that of many others brings to light a really significant threat. I have been looking for the statistics for Canada but I will use those for the United States. In the U.S., roughly 100,000 people a year die from using prescription drugs as prescribed. There are a lot of risks to using prescription drugs. Pain relief drugs can create an addiction problem. People are using prescription drugs in ways that were not prescribed. Canadians use roughly the same drugs. The number of Canadians who die every year from using a drug prescribed by a doctor they trust, without any warning about side effects or possible death, must be in the thousands.

In the case of the hon. member for Oakville, his daughter Vanessa Charlotte Young took the drug Prepulsid as prescribed for a fairly minor health condition. Her parents went with her to every medical appointment. No one said anything about a side effect that might cause death. No parent would ever have allowed their child to take that drug had they known.

The hon. member for Oakville wrote a wonderful book called *Death By Prescription*. In the book he tells of going on Johnson & Johnson's website after his daughter's death to find out information on Prepulsid. He found other stories online and found that investigations had been done on this drug and that 80 deaths had been associated with it. The doctor did not know that when he prescribed the drug. The parents did not know that. Young Vanessa certainly did not know that.

Bill C-17 shines a light on a very large problem but it only begins to deal with the problem. When we think about the drug-pushing criminal element, we do not tend to think of white-collar crime. That is what this is. When a pharmaceutical executive decides not to warn the health minister that there are problems with a drug, that some people might die, because the company's profit margins are high, then that kind of activity should be criminal. If that executive decides that any studies done on a drug are proprietary, are confidential, and should never be shared, that kind of activity should be criminal. This legislation proposes steps to criminalize it.

● (1150)

I think a lot of members will have read the book *The Constant Gardener* or saw the film. It always struck me that the most powerful part of that work of fiction by John le Carré was his comment in the legal disclaimer so that no drug company could sue him. He wrote:

> ...I can tell you this. As my journey through the pharmaceutical jungle progressed, I came to realize that, by comparison with reality, my story was as tame as a holiday postcard.

We are dealing with a seriously corrupt process. I am not talking about any individuals within it, but when the large pharmaceutical companies around the world have so much power over regulators that they can avoid having automatic recalls for drugs or having the drugs assessed properly before they are registered, we have a real problem.

One place we could look for solutions is a wonderful institution that operates out of the University of British Columbia called the Therapeutics Initiative. That institution does something that, unfortunately, is all too uncommon. It refuses to accept any favours, trips, or presents from drug companies. It operates on a very strict ethical code of conduct and reviews the data packages that it is allowed to see from the health department of British Columbia. It decides and advises the government whether pharmaceutical drugs being proposed for use in the B.C. health care system will do more benefit than harm. It has come to different conclusions than Health Canada on a number of occasions.

Where are the clauses of the bill that need to be beefed up? Some of my colleagues have mentioned this already. Briefly, we need to look at transparency. The *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, by the way, wrote an excellent review on this bill called, “Regulating prescription drugs for patient safety: Does Bill C-17 go far enough?” It was released May 13 of this year and I commend it to members. It provides some very good areas where the bill could be strengthened.

One thing it points to, and others have as well, is that there should be the registration of all drug trials and the results of those drug trials should be made public. A recommendation from the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* article is that we should also make sure that when Health Canada decides not to register a drug and concludes it might be unsafe, that information should also be made public. Health regulators should no longer tremble with fear about what the pharmaceutical industry might do to them if they warn the citizens of their country that a drug may have very significant side effects that pose a threat to life and health. Therefore, more transparency is required, and I hope that will be seen at committee.

The second area is clause 31.2 of the bill, that would increase the level of fines up to $5 million. It sounds like a lot until we look at the recent drug company settlements around the world. This is a list just in the last few years, since 2008. GlaxoSmithKline, for fraud and illegal promotion of Paxil, Wellbutrin, and Avandia, was fined $3 billion since 2012. The $5-million penalty in this bill puts it into a bit of perspective. Merck, for kickbacks to health care providers, paid $1.6 billion in settlements and fines since 2008. Eli Lilly, for the illegal promotion of Zyprexa, has paid $1.3 billion since 2009.

There is a very long list here of significant fines. For off-label promotion of Topamax, an epilepsy drug, Johnson & Johnson was fined $81 million. There were $600 million in fines for the off-label promotion of botox to Allergan. Novartis was fined $422.5 million for the off-label promotion of Trileptal in 2010. The list is longer than I have time for in my short speech. I hope it makes it clear to parliamentarians that while $5 million is a big number to us, it is small change to big pharma. We need to boost the penalties.

In my remaining time, I want to suggest that at the end of the question and comment period following my speech, we put to the House that since all members in all parties that have so far spoken to this bill today support its passage and would like to see it go to committee, we ask for unanimous consent to approve this quite excellent bill and work to make it better.

● (1155)

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands from the bottom of my heart for a heartfelt and highly accurate speech. I certainly agree that the Therapeutics Initiative is one of the best institutes in Canada for identifying safety risks around prescription drugs, and has been for some time. Her call for amendments to be bill, from my viewpoint, are more than welcome, and the Minister of Health has said she is willing to consider amendments. In my view, this is democracy at its best. It is a non-partisan issue and the minister is taking a non-partisan approach, so I am very pleased about that.

The member talked about fines of $5 million a day. The bill also includes the provision that when there is criminal negligence and a court saw that it needed to be addressed with a major fine, there could be unlimited fines. A judge could conceivably fine a big pharma company that committed criminal negligence the full amount of their sales for the period of time the drug was on the market.

We need Bill C-17 now, as soon as possible. We need it approved now at second reading to get it to the health committee, if the House approves. We can talk about those issues and hopefully get the bill passed by the end of June. We need to get it approved now. I am hoping that today, at the end of the hour, the parties will agree to send it to committee so that we can reduce the damage and the adverse drug reactions that patients might otherwise experience if we drag out this process.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I am humbled by the very kind words of the member for Oakville. He knows this file better than anybody, at a personal cost that none of us should have to pay. We are in his debt.

I am certainly heartened that it is possible for the fines to be increased if the courts find criminal negligence causing death, but I think the minister should have the ability to raise the fines, rather than just having the ability for a judge down the road, at the judge's discretion, to apply the kinds of fines that will make big pharma recognize that Canada is not a country where they can play fast and loose with our health.

● (1200)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague and I was very interested in the litany of fines that have been paid out by big pharma.

There was a real eye-opener for me one night when I was at a restaurant that a friend owned. The friend was putting on a dinner for doctors. It was a private function. Someone showed up at the door of the restaurant with an envelope containing $500 cash. The restaurant owner asked him what he was doing there, and he said he was paying for the booze. It was a salesman from a drug company.

The restaurant owner said, “I am sorry; this is not something I am supporting. You can leave if you are going to pay money to anybody to promote your drugs. If you want to promote your drugs, do it outside my premises”.

I was very shocked by that. I had no idea whether this was a common practice or not, but it certainly struck me.

I ask my hon. colleague if she could drill down a bit more for people listening to this debate about the kinds of fines that have been paid by these companies, because these fines really raise questions about basic standards of putting public interest ahead of the very large profit margins that may be at stake.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I wish the story of the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay about someone showing up with an envelope full of cash was unusual in this business. I was shocked to hear from experts in the Therapeutics Initiative, and this is a stunning statistic, that for every doctor in Canada, there are three drug salesmen. There are conferences. A seminar on a new drug happens to be held in Hawaii.

In his book, the hon. member for Oakville tells a story that I found at page 253. In referring to his time as a member of the provincial legislature in Ontario, he writes:

> The Big Pharma lobbyists are nice people. They have a job to do. And in most cases it includes spreading around a lot of money. They do it subtly. There is no *quid pro quo*. “Hey, if I buy you dinner...will you speak up to help get our drug approved...?” But before you finish the last bit of your beef tenderloin, you will have heard the marvellous story of how their drug keeps patients out of the hospital and saves the taxpayers hundreds of millions.

There is the pressure from the pharmaceutical lobby and the quite inappropriate distribution of gifts. As the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay said, the fact is that there is a litany. I did not mention Abbott, which blocked 23 states from obtaining a cheaper alternative to their cholesterol drug. They were fined $22.5 million in 2010 for blocking jurisdictions in the U.S. from accessing a cheaper version of the drug that works just as well.

Let us pull back the blinds on the pharmaceutical industry, which spends more money to find a cure for baldness than it does to deal with malaria. Let us look at the profit motive, which is insidious, and find more ways to get generics out there. Let us look very closely at trade agreements like CETA and the trans-Pacific trade partnership and see what that is doing to advance the profits of pharmaceutical companies at the expense of the people they are supposed to be curing.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's comments. The member for Timmins—James Bay also emphasized prevention.

Every year, 150,000 Canadians experience serious reactions to prescription drugs. We have been waiting for this bill for a long time. The Liberals were in power for 13 years, and they did nothing to ensure that drugs in Canada are safe.

Given that 19.8% of the new active ingredients approved by Health Canada between 1995 and 2010 later became the subject of serious warnings, does my colleague think that this bill will address all of our concerns? Is there any way this bill can be improved?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing.

I completely agree with her. There is no doubt that Bill C-17 is very important. This is a brave step forward in the interest of everyone's well-being.

However, we have to improve it, and I hope we can do that quickly. I believe everyone here agrees on that. The minister herself even said that she is ready to accept amendments.

We have to take decisive action against dangerous drugs. We have a once-in-a-generation chance to make sure this bill is as strong as possible.

● (1205)

[*English*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, this is really an important piece of legislation. As we said, it has been a long time coming. The Liberals certainly did not act on this issue. Given that we see a government that is going in the right direction but that sometimes thinks that what it has put forward is the be-all and end-all, it is again important to indicate that there needs to be oversight with respect to the amendments that will be put forward. Certainly our party is willing to put amendments forward once it goes to committee, but we should not be rushing legislation in the House just so it can get to committee for discussion and have the government members not even look at those amendments. Those are extremely important.

I know that my colleague is well aware of the Auditor General's report in 2011 on this issue, but I am asking if she thinks the bill is comprehensive enough. I am sure her answer will be "Of course not, because we have talked about amendments", but maybe she can elaborate a bit on some of the other safety aspects that we should be putting in place.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the comprehensiveness of the bill, it certainly addresses a lot of the right areas, and a lot will remain to be done by regulation.

We want to see the transparency that I referred to around all trials. All drug trials should be registered and their results made public. We want to see transparency around Health Canada's decisions on whether it is going to allow a drug or not, around the area of fines, and around drug recalls. We need to have much better information on the side effects of prescription drugs. As well, the labelling should be as clear as possible so that anyone with a prescription drug is able to see, without having to search out secondary materials, whether there are significant side effect risks with this drug.

Those pieces are coming in subsequent regulations, but when we go to committee, we will study it more closely. We are in somewhat of a hurry, because the sooner we act, the more Canadians can be protected from drugs that they never would have used if they had known of their health risks.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be in the House today to debate Bill C-17 at second reading, which is an opportunity to talk about the bill in principle before it goes to committee.

Before I begin my remarks, I just want to note that although we give numbers to bills, this bill has been referred to as "Vanessa's law". I want to pay tribute to our colleague on the other side of the House, the member for Oakville, for the incredible work he has done around drug safety, not only in his own constituency but also nationally, across the country. It is appropriate that the bill be named Vanessa's law and that it be a reminder to us all of what can happen when we do not have adequate legislation around drug safety in this country.

I am glad we are debating this bill. I have been told by some of my colleagues that a number of the government members are quizzing the opposition as to why this bill is not being rushed through. I want to begin with that point, because it is a familiar strain to hear.

The government introduced this bill back in December, I believe, but it did not come into the House for debate until March. When it came up for debate, it was a Friday afternoon, so it had maybe an hour of debate. This is the only opportunity that has come forward. Therefore, any suggestion that we have to rush this bill through or that somehow the opposition is holding this bill up is absurd and not based on reality, because it is the government itself that has dragged its feet on this bill.

We have said continually that we believe the bill should go to committee, but I am aware that some of my colleagues want to speak to this bill in principle at second reading, which is as it should be. I hope that it will go to committee soon so that the Standing Committee on Health can get into the bill, call witnesses, and examine it more closely.

I wanted to get that out of the way before we talk about the substance of the bill. It irks and irritates me that we so often hear this refrain that something has been slowed down or is not going fast enough when it is the government's own calendar and timetable that have pre-empted a bill being in the House.

We have had very minimal debate on this bill. Let us be clear about that. We do need to have debate at second reading. Second reading is here for a purpose. It is here for all members of Parliament to debate a bill in principle and get an overall understanding of it before it goes to committee and gets wedged into the clause-by-clause process.

Therefore, I am happy to be speaking today at second reading on Bill C-17, which would amend the Food and Drugs Act.

For the record, a number of my colleagues who have spoken to the bill and I as the health critic for the NDP, the official opposition, have said that we think this bill is a good first step in protecting the health of Canadians and improving the gaps in the current drug safety legislation. The bill is long overdue. When I say "long overdue", I mean decades.

I read an article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* a couple of months ago presented by Matthew Herder, Elaine Gibson, Janice Graham, Joel Lexchin, and Barbara Mintzes, who happens to be a researcher who lives in my community in east Vancouver. It was a good analysis of this bill and it was interesting to read their analysis.

It begins by pointing out something that people have probably forgotten, because it is one of those historical stories that happened long ago, but it had a profound effect on the lives of children, families, and Canadians overall. In their analysis, they begin by pointing out that Canada was the last developed country in the world to remove thalidomide from the market. To do that required an act of Parliament. That was in 1962. There are those of us here who remember hearing about the devastating consequences and catastrophic effects of that drug and what it did to children and families. Therefore, it is incredible that it required a specific act of Parliament to withdraw that particular drug. In fact, the two manufacturers voluntarily withdrew the drug from the market in March 1962.

● (1210)

However, that legislation stopped short of granting legal authority to the director at the health branch to unilaterally recall drugs, even though officials recognized that the co-operation of the manufacturer to recall a drug from the market could not be solely relied on.

Here we are, more than 50 years later, and we still have this gaping hole in Canada's Food and Drugs Act. We still have a huge issue around drug safety. Certainly, Health Canada is a regulator. It is meant to analyze new drugs that come on the market and approve them. Astoundingly, however, the federal government has never had the power to actually recall a drug. It has to negotiate around that.

There are many examples over the years where we have seen consequences from minor to serious to catastrophic to death because of this lack of oversight and based on the principles of caution and safety of Canadians. We are very glad to see that the bill would allow the minister to recall drugs. It would give fairly extensive powers, which is very important.

I want to give some broader oversight. A number of issues related to the bill are also very important.

I just quoted from an article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. While they support Bill C-17, they outline the need for at least six critical elements to be looked at and hopefully examined and added to the bill. All these people are experts. They are very involved in the issue of drug safety in Canada, and have done a lot of analysis not only on this bill, but on the reality of drug safety in Canada. I would like to spend a little time going over those elements.

By way of backdrop, we should be aware that even the Auditor General, in 2011, warned consumers, the government and all of us as legislators that consumers were not receiving proper safety warnings about pharmaceutical drugs fast enough because Health Canada was so slow to act on the potential issues that it identified. That was a pretty serious matter, and it took the Auditor General making a public report to flag the issue of drug safety. In that report, the time lag was characterized as very serious. It noted that it meant people sometimes had to wait more than two years before Health Canada completed a drug safety review of a product already on the market and provided updated information about the risks.

As the Interim auditor general noted at the time, "I think two years is too long", and we certainly agree with that point.

That same 2011 audit also found there were gaps in the transparency about drug information. In fact, it is really keeping Canadians in the dark about Health Canada's drug safety work. There has been an issue about clinical trials and the lack of information that is being provided, which has been a long-standing issue.

We should note that in many other countries, information around clinical trials is provided so researchers, medical practitioners and consumers alike can make themselves aware, if they want to, about a product, particularly at the clinical trial level, and this is very important.

I know the minister recently made announcements about providing better information. Again, this is a good step, but it is very important to have this as part of a legislative package to ensure there is transparency in the work of Health Canada.

What do we have to hide? We should have nothing to hide. This information is critical to the health and safety of Canadians and to the medical community. It is also critical to health researchers who examine new products that are coming on to the market and the kind of testing and clinical trials that have been done.

● (1215)

We should always be on the side of transparency, of accountability and of advocating for much greater safety measures. If this means some of the procedures become more complicated for the manufacturers or they have to go through other steps, so be it. What is paramount and what is the first order of the day is patient and drug safety. Certainly the bill will help in this regard, but more needs to be done.

Here are some of the other issues that hopefully will be examined at committee. Although the bill calls for mandatory reporting measures for health care institutions, we really need to look at not so much the issue of adverse reactions, but the failure of Health Canada to follow up on them, which the bill does not do.

Again, there is a huge issue in safety, adverse reactions and what kind of process is in place to ensure this is properly followed up on by Health Canada so we have a continuum. There should be a seamless process that is clear and transparent for Canadians, for people who are interested in this issue to know they do not have to keep digging deeper and deeper to try to figure out a little information here and there, or if an adverse reaction is reported, will it be followed up. These things should be taking place as a matter of course. These things should be fundamentally inherent in the Health Canada process. Unfortunately, we have seen these gaps and so it becomes a bit of a patchwork approach that simply has failed. This system has not been a great model for drug safety for Canadians.

This is one element of the bill that needs to be looked at because it does not deal with the failure of Health Canada to follow up on adverse reactions. Nor does the bill deal with the issue regarding off-label prescriptions for drugs for adults and the risks this may pose.

The bill impacts prescribing off-label drugs to children, which is a step in the right direction. As we know, the practice of off-label prescriptions means a prescription is used for another use than originally intended, which is often totally legitimately. However, the need for oversight on the safety of off-label prescriptions is really important. This question requires some examination.

I have spoken about access to public information, about drug trials and the need for additional drug testing as to why medications are considered safe or not. These are some of the questions that need to be examined at committee. We have to go through the system step-by-step and really examine where there are gaps are holes. We will have to question the officials very closely on this. None of us are particularly expert on this, but we will have to try to navigate that process as best we can. Then we will have to look at the bill and layer it over that process and determine what holes still exist and what gaps, problems and issues have not been identified and dealt with in the bill. I have named a few.

Certainly another issue is the question of labelling. We are very concerned that there needs to be a much better communications system set up between doctors, pharmacists and patients for communicating and reporting on risks. If we have a good system in place, if an adverse report has been made and if we know there is a risk, how can we ensure there is a better communication of those risks, either through labelling or how the medical community addresses this?

● (1220)

In fact, this has been a big issue at the Standing Committee on Health in recent months. We looked at the whole question of prescription drugs and how they could be either misused, mis-prescribed or abused.

These drugs can save lives, help people heal and get better, but they can also kill if they are not used properly. We heard many stories and examples about prescription drugs and the lack of information, or a heavy-duty selling job by a pharmaceutical company or not enough transparency and information about safety concerns or adverse effects of it affecting people.

Unfortunately, there are too many tragedies. There are too many cases of people suffering from adverse effects of prescription drugs because of improper prescribing or, worst case, of a fatal overdose and death.

This is a very important. In fact, we need some sort of national database that effectively communicates between the different parts of the health system. We have a complex health system, but there is a federal role, which is to provide leadership and give overall oversight on patient and drug safety.

Health care is delivered at a provincial level, and many players involved. At the end of the day, there has to be some federal responsibility. While I am glad the Minister of Health has understood and been clear that this issue needs to be addressed, we have a long way to go, not only in drug safety but in oversight of our health care system and ensuring there is proper communication between different parts of our health care system.

Joel Lexchin of York University, a real expert on drug safety and someone who has been before the Standing Committee on Health since I have been there, said that Bill C-17 was a step forward for Canada's drug safety legislation. However, he also expressed concern that the legislation did not go far enough and that Canadians still needed to know about the evaluation process that determined whether medications were safe enough to be sold in Canada.

I look forward to this going to committee. We support the bill at second reading. It is an important first step, but more needs to be done. I hope that when the bill gets to committee, we can actually look at it in good faith and look at it on its merit to determine the elements of the bill that are in good order, approve them and sent them back to the House for approval. However, I hope we also look at the bill with a critical eye. Surely that is what we are here to do.

Unfortunately, over the last few years I have seen amendments shot down at committee just because they came from the opposition. I really hope that does not happen. I know there are colleagues who care deeply about the bill and I know that at the end of the day we want to see the best bill we can.

I appeal to the members that when we get to committee, we look at its merits and at what we can do to make the bill better, to answer some of the concerns. There is overall broad support, but there are issues and concerns. Let us address those. Let us look into that and work in good faith to ensure the bill is the best it can be. We will then have done a good job.

● (1225)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with great interest to my colleague. She has such immense experience in the issues of the need for a national health care strategy in this country and the need for the federal government not to walk away from its long-standing role in the delivery of health care.

I would like to ask my colleague about the issue of prescribing practices.

I raised the issue earlier of when OxyContin was first put on the market. In Ontario, in particular, I noticed that it was being prescribed for all manner of reasons. People who would go in with a back problem or people who would go in for surgery were being prescribed sometimes large amounts of OxyContin. The impacts, the very addictive impacts of this drug, were not fully explained to the physicians who were prescribing, and it was certainly not explained to the people who received it. We saw spikes of addictions all across the spectrum of society. People ended up becoming addicted to this very addictive drug because there had not been the proper explanations. In the end, there was certainly a backlash on the whole use of OxyContin.

The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health has an optimal use program around the issue of prescribing and awareness amongst doctors.

There is an attempt to raise awareness, but there are concerns that there is not enough work being done to ensure that physicians are fully informed, independent of the drug companies' claims, of the potential impacts before they start to prescribe.

I would like to ask what my hon. colleague thinks of this.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. In fact, this is specifically one of the issues that the Standing Committee on Health looked at just a couple of months ago. I can tell members that we heard some pretty disturbing testimony. For example, we heard from researchers who told us that they went to so-called "educational sessions" that were paid for by pharmaceutical companies; that they were really about the promotion of a particular drug; and that then they would get, not a diploma, but some sort of certificate to say that they had gone to this educational session and that it was A-okay, green light ahead. Yet, of course, as the member points out, we have seen some really disturbing situations with OxyContin. It is a very powerful drug.

I have to say that pain management is a very important thing. It is a huge issue in this country. There are many people who are living with severe pain. In fact, there is a group called Canadian Pain Coalition that works on this every day. It is very concerned about ensuring that bona fide drugs are available for pain management.

However, there is a critical issue about prescribing practices and ensuring that drugs are being used for the appropriate setting with a patient and that the prescriptions are not just being ripped off the prescription pad; and of course in other circumstances people are actually selling the drug or abusing it themselves.

It is a huge issue, and I am very glad the member raised it, because I do not think we have really gotten to the bottom of it yet.

● (1230)

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her speech.

One of the reasons that Vanessa's law did not come to the House sooner is the wide consultations the government did. They have been very significant and wide ranging. The government consulted with numerous stakeholders, including patients, consumers, the industry, and health care professionals. It was a very exhaustive consultation.

Some of the key groups included the Canadian Treatment Action Council, PharmaWatch, which I believe the member is aware of, the Best Medicines Coalition, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Canadian Medical Association, and the provinces and territories.

The round tables with these patient groups and health care professionals yielded widely based support for a strengthened drug safety system.

They also enthusiastically supported increased recall powers and increased fines and penalties that would better reflect the very serious nature of the offences.

These consultations provided the opportunity for these groups to fine-tune the provisions in Vanessa's law before it was brought before the House.

Canada needs this law. We need it soon.

I would like to ask the member opposite this. Does her party, the official opposition, intend to allow the bill to go to committee today?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I do not think we disagree. I am glad the consultations were held. In fact, I am assuming that the member is saying that those consultations were held before the bill was tabled. I think he said it helped in the final drafting of the bill, which is very important. I wish that had been done with Bill C-23, that there had been some consultation with somebody—that is, the Chief Electoral Officer or other political parties—as it fundamentally changed the Canada Elections Act. I am glad it happened on this bill, but it is kind of a rare thing.

My comments at the beginning were more that, while the government introduced the bill in December, it did not come forward for debate until March, and then it was for a couple of hours, which is pretty minimal for second reading.

We are here debating the bill today, and I know some of my colleagues want to speak on it because they feel very strongly about it. They are not on the Standing Committee on Health, so I hope they will have an opportunity to do that.

I also hope that the bill will go to committee quickly and that we can get into it there. I am glad it has finally come back to the House to be debated today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to this bill. This is kind of a magical moment. Every now and then, a rare bill brings Parliament together to pass a law that is good for all Canadians. I believe that is what is happening now.

However, I have two concerns about this bill. The first is that we have to make sure the bill will be properly enforced. Passing a bill is all well and good, but it has to be enforced. Unfortunately, in many areas, the devil is in the enforcement details. The government has good intentions, but, unfortunately, it does not provide the tools to properly enforce the law. The unfortunate events that occurred in Walkerton are an example of that.

My second concern is about generic drugs. Most of them are not currently subject to clinical trials. Basically, the brand-name drugs go through clinical trials, and the generics just copy them. Unfortunately, too often, there are quality differences between the brand-name drugs and their generic equivalents. It has been found that imported generic drugs are often dangerous.

I would like the NDP health critic to tell me whether this bill will protect us from such situations.

● (1235)

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for two excellent questions, and I certainly agree that we will examine the bill in depth and will try to improve it.

The member made a very good point on the resources. We have seen cuts in Health Canada; however, we need the tools and resources to provide the transparency, improve the timeline of reporting on adverse reactions, and acknowledge the concerns that the auditor general made in 2011. Those all require human resources.

I do not know how much we will get into that at committee, but it is certainly something we would like to raise to make sure that the bill, when it is finally approved and implemented, would actually work and that the resources would be there.

In terms of generic drugs and the transparency that is needed, particularly if they are coming from abroad, I think the member raises a very good question. We in the official opposition are steadfast in our belief that there needs to be full transparency, not just around trials, but on any drugs that are being used.

People should be able to get drug information, whether on brand name drugs, generic drugs, or drugs that have come from somewhere else. They should get the information they need whether they are patients, researchers, or medical practitioners. Again, we have to err on the side of caution. We have to err on the side of full transparency.

I appreciate the member's point, and I think it is going to be a very interesting debate at the committee as we get into these questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, or Vanessa's law, as we call it in the House.

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

By all accounts, this bill deserves our support, at least for further debate in committee. Even though the fundamental and necessary steps have been taken, there are some gaps. My colleague was clear about that.

Let us talk about the bill. Why would we need this bill? Something that happened recently in New Brunswick effectively illustrates the need for this bill. It happened in Ontario as well. Diluted chemotherapy drugs had been administered. If I recall correctly, more than 1,000 patients received these substandard diluted drugs. The patients involved deserved a lot more information than was available at the time.

There needs to be transparency. The more information that patients, citizens, pharmacists, and doctors have, the better. We need to have reliable information. I do not want Canada to become like the United States where drugs are marketed to be sold at a profit for the pharmaceutical company.

The goal is to put Canadians' health first. To have good health, there is nothing better than self-defence. The individual should have the choice. I think my colleagues on the government side might very well understand that, fundamentally, it is an individual choice to know what drugs might best protect us. That choice is made in co-operation with pharmacists, doctors, and the government, who have the information and should ensure transparency.

We are talking about co-operation between experts in the field and the individual who must choose what is best. There needs to be information. The problem now is a lack of transparency. The bill before us today raises a lot of questions, namely whether the transparency that will be there once this bill is passed will be adequate. People want to make informed decisions. Canadians have less and less confidence in their government. They are wondering whether the government is providing them with the necessary information.

There is talk of letting 28,000 federal public servants go. We know full well that this will have an impact on services. Many scientists have been fired, as have front-line employees who took phone calls from people looking for information. The government needs to be there to provide services to the public. Taxpayers have paid for this piece of legislation before us and they should benefit from it. When bills are introduced by the government without sufficient funding, and there are not enough people to study and enforce them, then there is not enough information to share with Canadians.

The fundamental problem I have with this government is that it does not understand the correlation between government resources and sharing information with Canadians or being transparent with them.

That is exactly why I feel this must go to committee. We need to look at the lack of resources. Federal resources are constantly being cut. Tax credits are constantly being increased for companies that do not need them, such as banks. Those companies are benefiting tremendously. I think that they are capable of paying their own experts.

● (1240)

When it comes to fundamental issues such as health, medication options, and choosing medical services they rely on, Canadians often lack the necessary information and have to do their own research.

We want to see better collaboration with pharmacists. They are open; they want to talk about products. Unfortunately, even after this bill is passed, pharmacists will not have enough information to properly explain the merits of each medication to their clients.

Clinical trials will be no more transparent than they were before. Pharmacists will not know the results of clinical trials conducted by the companies, which are often private. Pharmacists try to have confidence, but open and public transparency is the best way for companies to gain their trust.

Unfortunately, this bill does not do enough to ensure this transparency and collaboration that in a democracy are vital to making informed decisions. Should the bill be defeated for that reason? I believe it deserves to be sent to committee for further debate. That way, the people working in the field and patients who need services and who have something to say will be able to provide input that will improve the bill.

If the government were serious, it would have introduced this bill a long time ago. Members will recall that it finally introduced the bill in December as a result of pressure from the opposition. However, debate was very short, as the House spent less than one hour on it. Today, the government has finally brought it back. We understand that it wants to put it in place quickly. However, if it was in such a hurry, it could have introduced it a long time ago.

When people call on their government to provide a service, that government should listen instead of always passing harmful regulations and laws. For example, when the government amended the Navigable Waters Protection Act, the amendments were very detrimental for the fishing industry in my region. Instead of spending this time on bills that are detrimental to my constituents, we could have passed bills that everyone in the House could get behind, that warranted our attention, and that deserved being passed as quickly as possible.

For example, we could have addressed health issues. We absolutely must look after our constituents. They expect the House to do what it takes to ensure that they have all the services they deserve. We absolutely have to think of our constituents. When there is a possibility that some people will take medications that are diluted, improperly prescribed or that clearly do not comply with regulations, the best course of action is to inform people, pharmacists and doctors about the specific trials conducted, the reasons why the medications provided by pharmaceutical companies are on the market and their usefulness.

Canadians need to know that the drugs they are taking have been approved and that they are adapted to their needs. However, they do not have this information. Once this bill passes, someone would still have a hard time understanding why a drug is useful.

We want to have faith in our doctors, pharmacists, nurses and government. However, for that to happen, Canadians need to know that the government is giving them all the information available.

That is why it is so important for clinical trials to be transparent, and a number of witnesses called for that. They want more transparency.

● (1245)

Everyone would win if the government were more transparent, and being transparent in this bill would be a good start.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to comment on the bill and pose a few questions. I recognize that there is a need for the legislation. The Liberal Party health critic has talked about what is positive about the bill. It is also important, from the Liberal Party's perspective, that the government be open to amendments to the legislation. Given the interventions from members of the Conservative Party, in the sense of goodwill moving forward and looking to the possibility of allowing amendments, one of the interventions made the suggestion that we consider passing this legislation before we break today.

My question for the member is this. To what degree is the NDP prepared to allow this bill to pass today or does it think that it is necessary to continue the debate into the days ahead?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the other opposition party for his question.

There was barely one hour of debate on this bill when it was introduced in the House in December. It deserves much more attention. I think the committee deserves to hear what the House thinks to get a better idea of what direction the House would like the committee to take.

We invite members to share their constituents' thoughts on this bill in today's debate, to ensure that the debate is complete. We need more debate. The amount of time spent on this debate depends on the members in the House, on both the opposition and government sides.

It is up to the Speaker and the members to decide how long this bill should be debated.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to please consider going to his House leader now and asking his House leader to arrange to have Vanessa's law, Bill C-17, sent to committee today.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his suggestion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier, my colleague said that there had been consultations and that several groups supported Bill C-17. However, I think we must set the record straight.

It is true that several associations say that Bill C-17 is a step in the right direction. However, they have reservations and say that this bill does not go far enough.

If I am not mistaken, the Canadian Nurses Association, for one, says that it hopes that experts in the field will be consulted to ensure that stronger and more meaningful action is taken. It is good that the players in the field want to be consulted and taken into consideration.

Does my colleague also think that this should be given serious consideration in committee?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

That actually brings us to the issue of transparency and the real trust people have in this government when it comes to consultation.

Previous bills have eroded this trust. It is very difficult to trust the government when consultations are often bogus or non-existent. We know that the government often tries to push bills through the various stages very quickly. Mammoth bills are a very good example, because we have very little time to debate them. However, we need to take the time to do so. I want the House to be able to express its point of view so that the committee understands the direction the House is taking.

I invite the members of the House who want to move forward more quickly to make their comments as soon as possible so that we can guide the committee in its work.

In addition, the government often—all too often—tends to limit debate on bills. We have seen this on many occasions. I hope the government will clearly understand that a bill must not be passed quickly; instead, it should be well thought out. Experts and stakeholders must be given an opportunity to testify.

We hope there will be a good debate in committee, as well as in the House.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, we are talking about Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act. My first comment is that it is about time.

Finally, society will be able to better protect people. Finally, the government will have the power to order drug recalls. Finally, the government will have the power to order manufacturers to change the drug labels to include the side effects of a drug. Finally, the government will be able to order the assessment of drugs. Finally, the government will be able to require manufacturers to keep the available information up to date. It is about time.

When profit hangs in the balance, I do not believe in voluntary approaches. Earlier, my colleague talked about the Walkerton tragedy. We could also talk about the XL Foods recall. There are also heartbreaking examples related to the train derailment in Lac-Mégantic last year.

Good health is the most precious asset of every member of the House and everyone watching. We even wish people good health at the beginning of a new year. That is why I believe that this bill is a step in the right direction. I believe that we must move forward with this bill, but that we must also examine it carefully.

Basically, the bill explains that better coordination is needed when it comes to health administration. That is why this bill is a step in the right direction. We need a broad view of health and a comprehensive approach to pharmaceuticals to serve human beings. That is what we need.

In my riding, there is a company that tests drugs . Not to name names, but it is called inVentiv Health Clinics. I have had the pleasure of visiting this company, which conducts clinical research. I learned about the importance of the clinical trials conducted by pharmaceutical companies. In this era of globalization, clinical trials are conducted throughout the world, including in Canada. The unfortunate part is that the rigour of these tests varies from company to company and from country to country.

Legislation such as this, which requires manufacturers to take more responsibility, may ensure that clinical trials are more rigorous. It may also bring contracts that are currently being awarded to foreign companies back to Canada. This would be advantageous for Canadian companies and could be a positive effect of the bill. We would therefore be able to provide higher drug assessment standards for Canadians, including during the clinical phase.

We also have to talk about production quality and the distribution chain for drugs. We cannot remain silent about how drug shortages are managed. We also have to talk about transparency. A number of my colleagues have talked about transparency and how important it is. More and more, the world of pharmaceuticals is unbelievably complex. The pharmaceutical industry faces major challenges in coming up with new medications to improve our health, our children's health and our neighbours' health. Managing that complexity is increasingly difficult. That is why doctors and pharmacists, the people we trust when we have health problems, must have at hand all possible information about the products they are prescribing.

● (1255)

They want the best for us, we want the best for ourselves, and everyone wants to be healthy. Given the complex environment of medications today, increased transparency of course will help the specialists to make the best decisions possible, which is what each and every one of us wants. Clearly, to get an overall picture of medications, we have to look at both sides of the coin.

Very briefly, I would like to talk about experimental treatments. A young mother in my constituency suffers from ovarian cancer that no longer responds to traditional treatment. As much as we want to protect all Canadians from side effects and from frankly obscure studies through this bill, we also want to help this mother of two in my constituency who wants access to experimental drugs that have not gone through all the clinical trials and all the testing. I mention this because I feel it is important for us to understand the degree of complexity the world of medications has reached today.

That is why I am pleased that we are discussing this bill. That is also why I feel that we need to take the time to debate it properly and consider it as a first step towards better use of medication in our society. That is also why I am speaking about the importance of a comprehensive examination of the use of medication. I do not think we should be looking at one aspect at a time in order to fix a minor problem and then moving on to try and coordinate all the various aspects. That usually does not work very well.

I am therefore asking the House to continue studying this bill, but to do so in a comprehensive way so that we can avoid making this a technical process when it should be a holistic one.

We want to look at the complexity of the issue, but to do that we need an overall plan. We need to be able to inform our specialists, but Canadians also need to know what they are getting themselves into when they are taking medication. Taking something for a headache is fine. However, sometimes even taking too much of a certain medication for a headache can have severe side effects.

We need to be able to give people the tools so that they can have an intelligent conversation with their specialist. That specialist must have relevant information and be able to recognize how various medications interact with one another. That is especially important for seniors. The more medications someone is taking, the more important it is to know how those medications interact.

That is why we think this is a step in the right direction. In committee, we will propose amendments that call for more transparency. We also want to see a better communication system between the various stakeholders so that each one of us and every professional has the tools required to make the best decision possible.

● (1300)

[*English*]

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech and his remarks. He made comment about the difficulties in the pharmaceutical industry in bringing a drug to market and addressing the issues in the health care field.

It is worth noting, though, that one of the key problems in the industry is that most of what is produced is drugs that offer no significant new therapy. The source of that information is the marketed products prices review board of Canada. It reviews every new drug that it wants to get approved on the market, and it decides if it is a significant new therapy or not. If it is a significant new therapy, it will allow for more to be charged for the drug.

In the past, it has had years where, when the drug companies come to Canada to apply to put on the market and get a notice of compliance, as many as 97% of all new drugs are copycat drugs. The companies have taken a molecule of an existing drug, such as Viagra, and made a new drug out of it, such as Cialis or Levitra. It is a variation of an existing drug on the market. That is the industry's key problem. It is not coming up with new drugs that offer significant new therapies.

I would like to ask the member to go to your House leader. You have recognized the importance of the bill. Ask your House leader to help us send it to committee today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I presume it is not my House leader.

The hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his comments.

I hear his suggestion, and we all agree with the bill in principle, but I would like to know why his House leader did not put this bill forward faster. Why did his leader not introduce it faster?

We are not here just to do trivial, unimportant things. What we do here has an impact, and this time, it will have a real impact on the health of Canadians. In the lead-up to his question, the member talked about new drug molecules and variations on molecules, demonstrating just how complicated the drug sector is.

That is why I think we need the best possible legislation. We do not want to have to revisit this issue with new legislation because the work was not done properly the first time around.

● (1305)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we think of medications, it is important that we recognize that there are benefits versus risks. I would think that one of the greatest challenges that we have within government is the education about those benefits and risks.

A part of education means that we have to understand where we have issues with certain drugs when the risks are too high. There is this lack of information flow that supports Health Canada and other organizations to be able to educate the user. This is something that is critically important. I say that, because when I look at this legislation, what the Liberal Party and I see is legislation that at least moves us in the right direction. The Liberal Party's health critic has spoken on this legislation and indicated that we would like to see the bill go to committee. We are even prepared to see the bill go today.

My question for the member is, if the NDP is not in a position to pass this today, does he believe that they would like to get the bill called again? If so, when would they like to see it called again?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I always find it strange that, when a piece of legislation deserves our attention, they tell us we have to act fast.

If a piece of legislation is important and vital, we have to take our time with it, pay attention and propose amendments. When members of the House rise to give speeches, what are they doing? Nothing less than enhancing the work of the committee when the time comes to study the bill. This is enhancing that work. That is why I think we have to carry on for as long as it takes.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take special interest in federal policies, legislation, and the regulations that govern the pharmaceutical sector. The western part of Montreal, a great part of which falls in the riding of Lac-Saint-Louis, includes many brand-name pharmaceutical companies and medical equipment suppliers that together employ a great many of my constituents. As a result, I am fortunate to be regularly kept apprised of issues impacting this industry. Constituents also contact me to share their concerns about matters like the cost of drugs and drug safety.

Liberals support sending Bill C-17 to the health committee for review and improvement. Whether the government agrees to important amendments at committee will signal whether it truly takes the safety of Canadians with respect to pharmaceutical products seriously.

Incidentally, I applaud the member for Oakville who has been relentless in pressing for enhanced drug safety in Canada. I have been witness to his interventions at health committee and can attest to his tenacity and expertise on the issue.

Bill C-17 however is a delayed response to an issue that has demanded our focused attention going back to the very beginning of the Conservative government's mandate.

A key pillar in the national pharmaceutical strategy launched in 2004 was "Strengthening evaluation of real-world drug safety and effectiveness" to strengthen surveillance of prescription drugs.

An earlier attempt to address the issue, Bill C-51, languished on the order paper when the government, violating its own fixed date election law, triggered the 2008 election. That was six years ago. Canadians would like to know what has taken the government so long to address such a vital issue.

Let me get to the bill. What would Bill C-17 do? The bill applies to prescription and over-the-counter drugs, vaccines, gene therapies, and medical devices. The main features of Bill C-17 are as follows:

First, the bill would require mandatory reporting by health care institutions, presumably meaning hospitals, of adverse drug reactions in patients so that the government may know whether to re-evaluate a drug's safety.

Second, the bill would empower the government to order recalls of unsafe drugs without first entertaining representations from the manufacturer or being obliged to negotiate the recall with the manufacturer, provided the Minister of Health "believes that a therapeutic product presents a serious or imminent risk of injury to health...". Astonishingly, the government does not already possess this authority when it comes to therapeutic products like drugs. On the other hand, the federal government currently has the power to recall bad toys, tools, cleaning supplies, clothing, and food, something it does with varying degrees of efficiency, but not unsafe drugs. Currently, drug recalls are at the discretion of the manufacturers and distributors. This is hard to believe but true.

Third, not only would Bill C-17 give the government the power to recall drugs, it would create stronger penalties for the marketing of unsafe pharmaceutical products, including jail time and new fines of up to $5 million per day instead of the current $5,000.

Fourth, the bill would authorize the Minister of Health to order a person to provide the minister with any information in the person's control regarding a therapeutic product that the minister believes "may present a serious risk of injury to human health" and that "the Minister believes is necessary to determine whether the product presents such a risk".

Fifth, the bill would also authorize the Minister of Health to require label or packaging changes if the minister "believes that doing so is necessary to prevent injury to health...".

Finally, the bill would allow the minister to order therapeutic authorization holders to conduct assessments and provide the results to the minister and in order to improve understanding about a product's effects on health and safety, compile information, conduct studies and tests, or monitor experience regarding a therapeutic product.

The bill is seen to have some important loopholes that compromise its ultimate effectiveness.

First, the definition of "therapeutic product" does not include a natural health product within the meaning of the National Health Products Regulations.

Furthermore, stakeholders are concerned about what constitutes a "prescribed health care institution" under the bill. Does this definition only mean hospitals or does it include clinics and doctors in family practice?

● (1310)

Also, the bill raises the real-life distinction between sellers of therapeutic products and holders of drug authorizations, underscoring the fact that in the complex modern marketplace, they may be different entities.

Incidentally, a therapeutic product authorization is:

> ....the authorization that permits the import, sale, advertisement, manufacture, preparation, preservation, packaging, labelling, storing and testing of a therapeutic product.

As an example of the distinction, and to quote an article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*:

> ...the company holding the market authorization may...license distribution to another company.

An historic example shows us why the distinction is significant and why there is a need for the bill to cover both sellers and those with authorization. When, in the 1960s, thalidomide was suspected of being harmful, manufacturers eventually withdrew the drug after some negotiation with Health Canada, the kind of negotiation this bill would presumably no longer require. However, free samples, the primary form of the drug's distribution, were still sitting in doctors' offices across the country. Health Canada did not have the legal authority to control or contain this problem.

The power the bill gives to the minister to recall or suspend drugs appears limited to sellers only. According to the CMA Journal, the health minister:

> ...should be explicitly empowered to issue suspensions and recalls to both types of "persons".

Another issue related to the question of the federal government's capacity to fully protect Canadians from unsafe drugs has to do with whether it has the financial and human resources to ensure that drugs important to Canada are manufactured under strict quality control standards, along with ensuring quality control in manufacturing facilities in Canada.

We know that the government has been cutting in areas related to environmental protection and health protection, whether at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or Health Canada. For example, budget 2012 cut 275 positions from the health products division at Health Canada, the group responsible for monitoring the safety and efficacy of prescription drugs.

Constituents have spoken and written to me because they have been concerned about conditions abroad in plants that manufacture drugs, often generics. Their concerns have often followed news of recalls of drugs such as Ranbaxy's atorvastatin calcium, the generic version of Pfizer's Lipitor.

For example, a 20 milligram tablet was recently found in a sealed bottle marked for 10 milligram tablets of the drug, resulting in a 64,000 bottle recall. This situation followed another episode, where glass particles were found in other batches of this same generic Lipitor.

As a result of such incidents, the U.S. FDA has apparently increased its presence abroad with a view to auditing certain facilities. What is Health Canada doing? Does it have the resources, financial and human, to do anything? Is it working with the FDA?

Whether in the U.S. or Canada, we need drug monitoring systems that catch problems before unsafe products are in consumers' hands and bodies.

This bill is obviously a good step in the right direction, but we have to ensure that any loopholes that would compromise its efficacy are closed. This can be done at the health committee. We also have to ensure that the government, quite apart from this bill, commits the funding necessary to guarantee that we have a safe drug system in Canada. It obviously has to work with the FDA and other international partners in the process of doing so.

Again, I congratulate the member for Oakville for his assiduous efforts in this area. I look forward to seeing what happens to the bill in committee.

● (1315)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

It is a pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Surrey North to speak to Bill C-17. Before I do, I would like to say that I had a chance to attend a graduation ceremony last night at Queen Elizabeth Secondary School where 310 young people graduated. I want to congratulate them and their parents for a job well done. It just so happens that Queen Elizabeth is my former school. I graduated from there many years ago. I took the red eye so I could speak to this important bill this afternoon.

Bill C-17 is a step in the right direction toward tackling a far-reaching problem. After years of pressure from the NDP, health care practitioners, and health care organizations, I am glad to see that the government is finally taking action to address many issues related to drug safety. However, while the bill is a definite step in the right direction, it does not go far enough in addressing some of the key gaps in Canadian drug safety legislation.

I am sure that all of my colleagues in the House would agree that all Canadians deserve to have the information they need to make informed decisions about their health care. Furthermore, I am sure we can all agree that all Canadians expect their health care providers to have all the information necessary to make the best decisions possible about the care they are providing, including information related to the medications they are prescribing. In reality, Canadians and their health care providers are being left in the dark when it comes to important decisions related to their health care. I can provide numerous examples for the House.

In 2011, the Auditor General warned that consumers were not receiving safety warnings about pharmaceutical drugs fast enough, because Health Canada is slow to act on potential issues it identifies. People sometimes have to wait more than two years before Health Canada completes a drug safety review of a product already on the market and before it provides updated information on the risks. This is a backwards process. Canadians deserve to have full information about pharmaceuticals before they make the choice to use them. One of the most basic principles we teach our children is to think before they act. The process Health Canada follows right now seems to encourage the exact opposite of that: use a pharmaceutical first and think about the potential consequences or side-effects later. This needs to change.

It is an unacceptable statistic that most risks associated with prescription drugs are identified after they are introduced to consumers. Almost one-fifth of new active substances approved by Health Canada between 1995 to 2010 were later given serious safety warnings. This further illustrates the backwards process currently being followed.

If that does not provide enough proof that drug safety legislation needs to be urgently strengthened, then let us look at the major drug safety incidents we witnessed in 2013.

How about the diluted chemotherapy drugs given to over 1,200 patients in Ontario and New Brunswick? How about the recall of the birth control pill Alysena 28? It took a full week before this recall was issued, and in the meantime, many Canadian women were exposed to unwanted pregnancies. If that is not enough, five other popular birth control pills were recalled and had serious safety warnings issued about them. The list goes on, but I think members are beginning to see a pattern here.

Canadians deserve better. They deserve to be presented with the full information they need to make informed decisions about their health. They should be able to trust that they will be protected from drugs that would put their well-being at risk.

● (1320)

It is for all these reasons that I, along with my colleagues, am glad to see this bill. Bill C-17 is a good step toward the comprehensive drug safety plan Canada so badly needs. Canadians should have assurance that their medications are safe for use, and they should have access to plain-language information on why their medications are safe.

Bill C-17, in its current form, would allow the government to recall drugs or order the distributor to take corrective action to remedy a problem with a drug. It is a scary thought that up until now, Canada has not had mandatory recalls for drugs. This means that even if a drug posed serious health risks to Canadians, the government could not force the manufacturer to remove it from the Canadian market. This aspect of the bill would give the government the power to protect Canadians when drug safety issues arise.

Bill C-17 would also give the Minister of Health the power to order a manufacturer or importer to modify the label of a drug to update the side effects or health risks associated with it. It would also require manufacturers to update Canadian information about the risks associated with a drug, even if the safety risks were discovered in another country. These are all important steps on the road to ensuring that Canadians have as much information as possible about the drugs they are about to use.

However, while we on this side of the House support the legislation, there is still more that needs to be done to improve drug safety in our country. This legislation still leaves many gaps that must be addressed.

For example, although Bill C-17 would improve labeling, it would not set up better communications systems between doctors, pharmacists, and patients for communicating and reporting risks. Likewise it would not increase access to public information about drug trials, additional drug testing, and why medications are or are not considered safe. While it would include provisions regarding reporting adverse drug reactions, there is no mention of a follow-up by Health Canada to these reports.

There are more steps that need to be taken and more issues that need to be addressed to create the comprehensive drug safety plan that is needed in our country. Comprehensive drug safety legislation should include optimal prescribing practices to ensure that drugs are used only when medically necessary and for the correct reasons and that negative side effects and drug interactions are avoided as much as possible.

Canadians also deserve access to clinical trial results. The reporting of all trial results, both good and bad, would lead to better-informed health care decisions. Although since 2007 Health Canada has encouraged clinical trial sponsors to make their data available, it has no authority to compel this transparency, which is a vital component of a comprehensive approach to drug safety.

I am glad to see this critical step toward improving drug safety being taken. Bill C-17 has the potential to benefit all Canadians in a concrete way and to especially benefit vulnerable populations, such as children and seniors. The bill, in its current form, lays the groundwork for even more concrete measures to be taken to strengthen our drug safety legislation. It is my sincere hope that the government will carefully consider amendments that my colleagues will be proposing at committee that will strengthen the bill.

I would like to talk about that a little bit. We have seen over the last two or three years that the government has brought in legislation that has gone to committee stage. We have seen over and over that the opposition has made concrete, valid amendments. Unfortunately, the Conservatives do not seem to want to take any sort of advice, either from the opposition or from experts who have testified before the committees. I would urge the Conservatives to take into consideration amendments that will be offered at the committee stage to further improve this very important measure.

● (1325)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for taking the red-eye here and attending an important graduation last night. That was important. I have had the privilege of working with this member in the past.

In listening to the debate today, though, I think there is a concern that there is somewhat of a delay in getting the bill to committee. We need to get the bill through the House. It needs good discussions at committee, and potentially additions can be made to improve it.

One of the problems I see as I listen to a lot of the remarks from the NDP is that if we have the objective of making the bill perfect, we would probably lose the good that is in the bill, because it will never get to where it has to get to.

I ask the hon. member if the NDP is willing to speed this process along and get it done.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I have worked with the member for Malpeque, and he is very reasonable.

Of course we would like to see the bill approved as fast as we can, because it concerns the safety of Canadians, but we would also like to improve the bill. I know the Conservatives do not like seeing amendments to improve the bill, but we will offer those.

As I pointed out in my speech, we will not make everything perfect, but we could certainly improve the bill and get close to making it as perfect as possible. I would encourage the Liberal members also on the committee to offer some amendments to improve the bill, because that is what we are here for. We are here to offer amendments and offer ideas on how we can improve legislation that will protect Canadians.

I hope the member for Malpeque and his health critic will also come with some prepared amendments that will offer to improve the bill further.

● (1330)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his great speech. I think what he has touched on and what is fundamental with this particular bill is the role of government in making sure that Canadians are safe with regard to something as important to their health as prescription medication or medication in general.

The fact is that statistics have shown that not taking one's medication properly or not taking it all, because one misunderstands, can have dire consequences on one's health or could cause death. There is a tension between the interests of the pharmaceutical companies and their profit-making initiatives and informing the public, so there is definitely a role for government to play, a role that the NDP has recognized consistently. Informing and educating the public is essential. Making sure that labels are very clear is essential.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's opinion on that positive role that government can play with regard to our health system and our pharmaceutical industry.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree with the hon. member that the government needs to ensure that it protects the safety of Canadians, whether it is in drug safety or food safety. We have seen this government cut food inspectors. Canadians expect us to put mechanisms in place to ensure that they are provided with safe drugs and safe food. It is critical that we act in a fast manner to ensure that these measures are put in place.

Unfortunately, time after time we have seen the Conservatives fail to protect Canadians when it comes to drugs and food safety.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join my colleagues in the debate on this important bill, Bill C-17.

The debate we are having in the House today is also very important. I have heard Liberal members questioning the fact that NDP members are rising in the House to take a stand on Bill C-17 and propose solutions. I have heard Conservative backbenchers yelling for us to send the bill to committee.

I think they have forgotten what has been happening in committee since the Conservatives won a majority. The Conservatives say publicly that they are open to amendments and discussions with the opposition parties to try to improve bills, but when it comes time in committee to actually consider amendments proposed by the opposition to try to improve the bills, the Conservatives insist on meeting in camera and systematically oppose any idea that comes from the opposition, even if that idea was shared time and time again by various subject matter experts, groups and Canadians who expressed their views to members from all parties.

The NDP believes it is important to take the time to publicly propose in the House the amendments we would like to see made to Bill C-17 in order to correct the flaws that still exist in this bill. No bill is perfect when it is sent to committee after second reading in the House. I have been here for three years and I have never seen a perfect bill come out of the House at second reading, and I am sure that other members who have been here longer have not either.

This is where we begin thinking about the bill and we take the time to debate it. Quite frankly, I find it unfortunate to hear my colleagues from the other parties saying that we are wasting our time, that we should send the bill to committee and that we should trust the committee members who will examine it. I would like to have such blind trust in the government, which holds a majority on every committee, but to date, I have seen virtually no evidence of its good faith.

Unfortunately for the Conservatives, it is our responsibility to take the time to discuss the bill in the House at second reading. it contains some good elements. We in the NDP know full well that we will not be able to come to a perfect result in the debates here at second reading. It will be very difficult to achieve that result in committee, but we still have some ideas to put forward that were raised on a number of occasions by experts whom we consulted and who provided their opinions on the matter.

As some of my colleagues have mentioned, Bill C-17 deals with a very important issue, namely drug safety. The changes that will be made to the current legislation are long-awaited, so this is a good first step in the right direction. The bill before us today would allow the government to require the recall of drugs or to order distributors to take corrective action in respect of their products. It would also allow the Minister of Health to order a manufacturer or importer to modify the label on a product in order to provide the most current information possible on side effects and health risks associated with the drug in question.

Bill C-17 would also allow the Minister of Health to order that a drug be tested and the results sent to the minister, and to require manufacturers to update the information available in Canada about any health risks associated with their products, even if those risks have been identified outside Canada.

While information is available in other countries, and while scientists have conducted research and there are documented cases of problems caused by taking certain drugs or by drug interactions, this literature is not distributed in Canada. Therefore, Canadians have to do their own research if they want to be informed. This appalling situation is frankly incomprehensible. This is one of the most important improvements that must be made to the bill as presented to us today.

We in the NDP are pleased to see that the government has finally listened to the pleas of doctors, health professionals, and representatives from the area and from the NDP. Our health critic, the hon. member for Vancouver East has been questioning the government for a very long time. She has been putting pressure on the government to finally take steps to correct the shortcomings in the current bill.

We are pleased to see a result, and we support the bill at second reading. We want the bill to go to committee so that it can be studied in greater detail and so that the necessary amendments can be made.

● (1335)

However, we believe that the bill still does not go far enough. There are still a lot of flaws. Every year, 150,000 Canadians suffer serious reactions after taking prescription drugs. That is a significant number, and these people still do not have access to all the information they need and do not have all the means they might have to protect themselves. Among these 150,000 Canadians, seniors are five times more likely than the rest of the population to be hospitalized as a result of an adverse drug reaction.

According to a 2013 study by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, one in 200 seniors was hospitalized as a result of an adverse drug reaction, compared to one in 1,000 for the rest of the Canadian population.

Before I became an MP, I spent some time as an information officer for the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec. I regularly answered questions from people, mainly over the phone. We had to explain how Quebec's public health insurance plan and public drug insurance plan worked. The NDP would like to see such a plan implemented Canada-wide. However, that is a topic for another debate.

I also regularly spoke to seniors who called in for information on the price of medications or on how the public drug insurance plan worked. They also had a lot of questions about the drugs they were taking. I did not have the ability to answer them, since I am not a pharmacist or health care professional. However, I could see that our seniors were distressed because, over the years, they had been prescribed more and more drugs for various reasons and they did not always have the information they needed. Furthermore, the information on labels is rather complex and not necessarily very clear. When someone is taking 6, 8 or 10 drugs at the same time for various health problems, it is very important for that person to have access to clear, accurate, up-to-date information, regardless of the source. Whether the information is from an international source or the research was conducted in Canada, it should be provided to Canadians. We hope to see that happen soon.

In my riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, the population is aging. I am concerned about how the lack of up-to-date information is affecting people at present. I am truly worried about how this could affect the health of the seniors I represent and the general population.

The NDP has called for various amendments that we would like to see made to Bill C-17. First, we would like to ensure that best practices for prescribing drugs are adopted by physicians. We want to ensure that Canadians are prescribed the most appropriate drugs in appropriate quantities.

We are hearing more and more about overmedication, whether of our seniors or our veterans who need psychological or physical help and who are prescribed many drugs that are more or less effective. The vast majority of our population could benefit from major enhancements to drug safety.

The NDP would also like to see public disclosure of the results of clinical trials, which does not currently happen. This information will be held by Health Canada, but will not be available to the general public. Canadians do not have the right tools to determine the possible effects of different medications on themselves and on their health.

Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to speak about the various improvements that the NDP would like to make to Bill C-17. I will simply mention once again that we are very proud to support the bill at second reading stage. However, we hope that the work in committee will be done in good faith and that we will truly be able to focus on Canadians' health and safety and enact the best possible bill to protect our citizens.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her sincere speech and her dedication to prescription drug safety.

I would like to ask her if she would consider going to her House leader today, as soon as possible, and asking the House leader to approve sending this bill to committee today so that it is not delayed and it can be passed in the House of Commons, with any luck, with the agreement of the Standing Committee on Health, and can be sent to the Senate so that Canadians can become safer sooner. It is very important to get this bill passed as quickly as possible.

I would like to make that request of the member.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his question. I know that the issue we are talking about today is very important to him personally. I thank him for his work on this issue and the passion with which he defends Canadians' health.

If I was sure that the government would work in good faith with members of Parliament, that we would leave the committee with the best possible bill, that there would be no obstruction and that all the parties would truly work together, then I would be pleased to send the bill to committee as soon as possible. Unfortunately, our experience shows that we need to take the time in the House to debate the issue and present our arguments publicly because we are muzzled in committee.

If we are talking about issues that are crucial to Canadians, then the meeting goes in camera. I find it unfortunate to have to take so much time here in the House discussing an issue that is important to each and every one of us.

Unfortunately, this government's attitude since winning a majority leaves us, as opposition members, with no choice.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that not understanding the benefits versus the risks of medications will tragically cause some people to get sicker than they were when they started taking the medication in the first place. In many situations, people die as a direct result of taking medication without having a fair understanding of the risk factors.

The bill is a step in the right direction, and the health critic for the Liberal Party has been very clear that we believe we can do more to improve it. We are prepared to see the bill go to committee in the hope that the government will in fact accept and make the amendments that would make the bill that much more stronger.

The concern I have is that the New Democrats might be using this bill as some form of a bargaining tool. Does the member feel that the NDP is prepared to allow the bill to pass? When does she believe the bill would be called again? Ideally, how much more time would she like to see?

Given the expressions of support for the bill, whether from the leader of the Green Party, the government, the Liberals and even from her caucus, there seems to be consensus that it is a good bill that can be improved upon if it goes to committee.

When does the member anticipate that the NDP will be in a position to allow the bill to go to committee?

● (1345)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I find the Liberals' attitude to be especially funny. They are in a big hurry when they come to the House, but they spent years in government doing nothing, sitting on their hands and not advancing the issues. They could have resolved these problems years ago, when they were in government. Now they are trying to blame the NDP. They are saying that we are responsible for delaying passage of the bill that would help Canadians be in better health and better understand the effects of the drugs they take. Frankly, I think no one in Canada buys that argument.

The work we do in the House is important. My colleague should know how things work in the House. He has been here for some time. He knows full well that as soon as the Conservatives get to committee, they eliminate any possibility for discussion with Canadians. The meeting ends up in camera and we are unable to get our message across.

The NDP knows that, unfortunately, we can rarely trust the government. We take the time we are allocated in the House to debate and to proudly represent the Canadians who sent us here, and to speak to the issues that matter to them, including protecting their health.

[*English*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are having a wholesome debate today.

I want to reiterate what the bill is actually about. Bill C-17 would bring in the following measures. It would allow the government to recall drugs or order the distributor to take corrective actions to remedy the problem with the drugs. The government could order a manufacturer or importer to modify the label of a drug to update the side effects or health risks associated with it. The minister could order a review of the drug and to be reported back to the minister. People will be quite surprised by the fact that this cannot get done at this point. It would give the Governor in Council new powers to create regulations as needed for labelling and authorization criteria. It would require manufacturers to communicate risks associated with their drugs that have come up in other countries. It would impose new fines for keeping unsafe product on the market, up to $5 million per day, and could include jail time, with a stronger penalty if the manufacturer knowingly erred.

A lot of Canadians would be surprised to find out that these measures are not in place at this point in time. It is evident that we need a comprehensive drug plan so all Canadians can be assured their medications are safe for use and so they have access to plain language information about why their medications are safe, including the testing process and medication labelling.

We have heard over and over again at the health committee, when I sat on it a few years ago and today, whether it is GMO or anything else, that people want to see the labelling. They want to be informed, contrary to what the government sometimes thinks. Sometimes it thinks people are not paying attention to what is being said in the House. It thinks people are not paying attention to the bills. Canadians are paying attention.

While we support the legislation, more needs to be done to improve the drug safety measures. We will be proposing amendments to improve the bill. I understand the Liberals are also looking at proposing amendments as well. This is why we should not be rushing bills through. These issues date back many years. In 2011, the Auditor General warned that consumers were not receiving safety warnings about pharmaceutical drugs fast enough because Health Canada was slow to act on potential issues that it identified. That was one of the reasons the Auditor General brought forward.

Fast track now to 2014, three years later, and we are just getting this. If the government is saying that this was such a critical issue, why did it not bring it forward? If the Liberals are saying that this is such a critical issue, why did they not bring it forward when they had 13 years to do it?

I forgot to mention earlier, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time.

Certainly the NDP is looking at proposing amendments to improve the bill when it reaches committee. In the meantime, it is important to have a healthy debate in the House so we can get the ideas forward, so people can be more educated about what is going on and what the government is putting forward. It is a great bill. Why do we not want Canadians to know about it just by having the debate in the House and being able to hear from other witnesses as they may want to choose to have their words heard at committee, whether it is by writing a submission or being called as a witness?

Sometimes the government will put in place some type of advertising. This is basically what has happened here. It indicates it is taking care of the well-being of Canadians, but as we can see, the bill shows there was a big void. We know, for the most part, when we send something to committee, and my colleague spoke to this a little while ago, the Conservatives still have a majority on the committee and all too often they are just eager to pass legislation without proper amendments. Because the amendments are coming from the opposition, they sometimes think that they are not noteworthy.

Therefore, we want to ensure that people are aware of the proposition and of the changes and concerns we have with legislation. That is why we are having this debate today, so more people are aware of needed amendments and whether the government acts on those.

● (1350)

The Auditor General also found there were gaps in transparency that were keeping Canadians in the dark about Health Canada's drug safety work. Unlike many other countries, Health Canada also does not make information on clinical trials public.

I have a sister who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at the age of 50. She was on a clinical trial. We would have liked to have known what those results were at the end of the day and more information about that.

If information on clinical trials are public, they would show the health risks and side effects associated with the drug during its testing phase. All Canadians should be made aware of what those are. I also think the scientific community is looking at this as well. It does not want to be kept in the dark. The information needs to be passed on in a public way.

When it comes to providing Canadians with the information they need, Health Canada has been slow to react as of late. It took a full week before the voluntary recall of Alysena 28 was communicated to Health Canada and made public. Guess what happened with that? Many women were exposed to unwanted pregnancies. Now there is a class action lawsuit against Apotex for the faulty birth control pills.

The United States stops these medications from going forward. In Canada, we hear about these medications being taken off the market, yet we continue administering them to Canadians. We need to react a little more swiftly and we need to pay attention to what is going on. While Canadians are Canadians and U.S. citizens are Americans, they are all people and it affects them the same way.

Currently drugs can be prescribed without knowing what effects they can have on children, seniors, or nursing women because Canada and other countries do not share the information they collect on the particular effects of drugs and they do not ask drug companies to share it. That is extremely important.

It is not just the NDP that is calling for amendments to the bill.

Dr. Joel Lexchin, who is the drug safety policy expert at York University, calls Bill C-17 a step forward for Canada's drug safety legislation. We basically have said the same thing.

Dr. Lexchin has also expressed concerns that the legislation would not go far enough and that Canadians would still not know enough about the evaluation process that determines whether medications would be safe enough to be sold in Canada.

Let us hear what else he has to say on what needs to be improved in the legislation. I hope the colleagues across are listening to what needs to be improved because these are some of the amendments that the NDP will be bringing forward at committee.

He says that the new drug safety law should require that when the minister makes a decision about a product needing additional testing or that a product should be withdrawn, that all of the documentation used in making that decision should be made public. All of the safety and efficacy effectiveness information about a product that was generated either in the testing phase or once the drug was on the market should be publicly available, including periodic safety update reports. How important is that? It is extremely important.

He also says that the minister should be able to make decisions without prior consultation with the company involved, and those are important to note. All too often we find that the big corporate entities have the government in their pockets. Therefore, this would certainly put that to rest. When a company is required to do additional testing, there should be an annual report about the status of that additional testing. Additionally, the complete results of those additional tests should be public.

He further says that if companies are required to do additional testing, then the companies should turn over the funding to do that testing to a neutral third party, for example, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The CIHR should be responsible for selecting the researchers to do the testing and the data should be analyzed completely independent from the company.

This is about the safety of patients and Canadians.

The government can go on and on about doing some advertising, but until it takes action such as some of the amendments that have been suggested here, we will not get that perfect bill that could provide more security to Canadians. We know over and over again when the government has done advertising. We can look at the economic action plan. We can look at Twitter feed amount it actually puts in. What really matters is to ensure we have proper legislation that will protect Canadians.

● (1355)

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the member opposite said about amendments. The Minister of Health is on the record saying that she is willing to consider amendments to this bill, which is very positive. It is the way democracy should work, and it is the way democracy is working, if only we can get this bill to committee.

We do not make amendments in the House generally. Where do we make them? We make them in committee. I ask the member to please go to her House leader and ask him to get this bill to committee today.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, we already told the member that we are willing to move this to committee, but it does not mean we should forego our voices here in the House in the debate on the issues.

We all know full well that, once we are at committee, even though the minister says she is willing to look at amendments, all too often the government is willing to push forward without amendments because it has the majority. We want to make sure the Conservatives fully understand that we think this is a great bill and it is moving in the right direction, but it is imperative that there be amendments to it.

My question for the member, if he were able to answer, would be how this new legislation would improve the prevention of adverse drug reactions when it does nothing to change Health Canada's follow-up on adverse reaction reports.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude with the fact that, as I indicated before, the Liberal Party critic was fairly clear that the bill is a step forward. It is something that would make a difference in the lives of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Having said that, we have serious concerns in terms of wanting to present amendments. We are looking to the government to materialize on its commitment to approach it with an open mind and accept amendments. That is something that is very important to the Liberal Party.

Could the member provide her thoughts on how important it is that amendments be accepted at the committee stage?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I will make it as short as possible. I think I can give three areas where it needs to be improved. Optimal prescribing practices, public disclosure of clinical trial results, and strengthening the common drug review are three areas the government needs to consider when it gets to committee.

Statements by Members

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[*English*]

COUNTY OF PETERBOROUGH

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this past Friday evening some exceptional Canadians were recognized by the County of Peterborough. The County of Peterborough is a special place, renowned for its agricultural past and present, its natural beauty, and perhaps most important, the character and contributions of its residents.

On Friday evening, individuals and businesses were recognized for making Peterborough County a better place, a more prosperous place, and a better place to call home.

I want to congratulate all of the recipients and warden J. Murray Jones, deputy warden Joe Taylor, and all members of the county council for taking time to recognize the exceptional citizens who call Peterborough County home. I thank each and every one of them for making Peterborough County truly something to be proud of.

* * *

SOURIS SABRES

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the members of the Souris School boys rugby team. It has once again won the varsity boys Westman High School Rugby championship, for the third year in a row.

The team is made up of 19 players who showed grit and determination last weekend on the pitch during the championship game. In fact, the team was down the entire game, but the players did not give up and they did not lose hope. They battled back and scored on the final play of the game to tie it up and then kicked a convert to win 19 to 17.

I might be biased, as my family graduated from Souris School; however, I can say that without a doubt the entire southwest corner of Manitoba will be cheering for the Sabres as they advance to the provincials this coming weekend. The Souris Sabres team is now known far and wide for its rugby program, and I know it will continue to make us proud. Go, Sabres, go.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SUPPORT FOR CROWN CORPORATIONS

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last December, Canada Post, our crown corporation, announced an almost complete restructuring of its operations: higher stamp prices, the loss of 8,000 jobs and, of course, the gradual elimination of door-to-door delivery. Crown corporations belong to Canadians, and Canadians must have their say. The only consultations held on these very significant changes were bogus. That is why my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and I are organizing a real consultation. A public meeting will actually take place on Saturday, June 14, at noon, outside the Sherbrooke City Hall. Everyone is welcome.

This is also high season for Conservative cuts. Just yesterday, they voted against the motion moved by my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, which called for the cancellation of the cuts to the CBC. Despite the Conservatives' refusal, there will be a huge rally in Sherbrooke. Organizations and artists from my region are organizing an event to support the CBC, on Wednesday, June 11, at the Granada Theatre. Artists such as Richard Séguin and Clémence DesRochers will be on stage at this event. I hope that all the members will follow their lead and support the CBC. Together, we must show our support to protect our crown corporation.

* * *

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS IN SUDAN

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the outrageous sentence delivered to Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag by a Sudanese court recently. This young Sudanese Christian mother was sentenced to death for apostasy, in other words the renouncing of Islam, as she is a practising Christian. What is more, she was also sentenced to 100 lashes for adultery, which is particularly outrageous, because she is in the late stages of pregnancy with her second child. While her husband is of South Sudanese origin, he is non-Muslim, and therefore the court does not recognize the marriage. That is how the trumped-up charges regarding adultery were brought forth.

I am appalled, the Government of Canada is appalled, and the people of Canada are appalled by this flagrant abuse of human rights. This clearly infringes on the right of freedom of religion that is enshrined in Sudan's own 2005 interim constitution. Furthermore, it contravenes African and international treaties ratified by Sudan that prohibit this sort of shocking punishment.

I call on the Government of Sudan to intervene in this case and abide by its human rights obligations to its own people and to the international community.

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ANNAPOLIS VALLEY PEPSICO FRITO-LAY POTATO CHIP PLANT

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago I had the pleasure of once again touring the PepsiCo Frito-Lay Annapolis Valley chip plant in New Minas, Nova Scotia.

This plant was started in 1954 as Acadian Foods, and it currently produces Lay's chips, Ruffles, Hickory Sticks, and my all-time favourite, the spicy Kurkure Masala Munch. It was actually developed in India, but Kurkure Masala Munch, produced in New Minas, Nova Scotia, at the Frito-Lay plant, appeals to Canadians craving these spicy snacks in multicultural communities in large Canadian cities, which proves that multiculturalism creates jobs in small-town and rural Canada.

While plant ownership has changed throughout the years, producing a quality product has been a constant. Plant modernization, new export markets, its 150 loyal and dedicated employees, and a strong management team have brought the operation to its 60th anniversary of chip-making this month. I salute the management and workers at the New Minas plant for their achievement. Plant manager Greg Wagner, PepsiCo Foods Canada president Marc Guay, and PepsiCo's New Minas employees should be proud of their success and good jobs in the Annapolis Valley.

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● (1405)

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pride and honour that I rise today to commend two students from Centre Dufferin District High School in Shelburne, in my riding of Dufferin—Caledon.

Rebecca Janke and Jeff Allen have been chosen to be Canada's youth ambassadors at the upcoming ceremonies commemorating the 70th anniversary of D-Day. They will recite the commitment to remember in front of tens of thousands, who will gather in France on June 6 to pay tribute to the Canadians and our allies who took part in the Normandy landings.

Centre Dufferin has a long history with the Juno Beach Centre, being for many years the most active school in the country in terms of fundraising and commitment to our history there. It is a great credit to their teacher, Mr. Neil Orford, who is the inspiration behind these students' commitment. Earlier this year, Mr. Orford was awarded the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching in recognition of his outstanding efforts.

Congratulations to Rebecca and Jeff and all the students at Centre Dufferin. I know they will make Canada proud.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VIA RAIL

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the wake of VIA Rail's announcement that it will invest $10 million to save the line between Bathurst and Miramichi, I would like to thank the people and mayors of Acadie-Bathurst, eastern Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia for their support and involvement in this fight to save our VIA Rail train.

Over the past few months, I have received many messages of support and testimonies. Thousands of people signed my petition. Hundreds of people wrote to the Minister of Transport and also went to train stations to show their support for the NDP members who travelled to Ottawa by train.

The Conservative government heard how upset people were about its stance, and we were successful in getting the government to take action. My slogan, “Working for you, working with you”, shows that together we can accomplish great things and ensure that the Conservative government listens to us.

I am proud of what the people of Acadie—Bathurst and eastern Canada have done. We succeeded by working together.

[*English*]

TANKER TRAFFIC

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will soon decide whether or not the massive Downeast LNG project in Washington County, Maine, will proceed.

There is just one colossal problem with this grand scheme. Maine has hundreds of miles of coastline with direct access to the Atlantic Ocean, yet the LNG tanker transit route to this proposed American facility must navigate through Canada's internal waters in Head Harbour Passage and then straddle the internationally shared waters of Passamaquoddy Bay, providing unique environmental, navigational, and safety risks.

The Americans concede they do not have the authority to establish or enforce the safety and security zones in Canadian waters. The U.S. Coast Guard has concluded that Washington will need to coordinate maritime traffic in our waters with Canadian authorities for LNG tanker traffic to proceed.

Our Prime Minister has said Canada will not co-operate in these discussions. Our government has told the American administration that we will not permit LNG tanker traffic to threaten the livelihood of Canadian fishing communities. Canada will not become a convenient doormat for the Americans.

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ARMENIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow marks the 96th anniversary of the establishment of the first Republic of Armenia.

On May 28, 1918, Armenia re-emerged as an independent state following hundreds of years of Ottoman and Russian occupation. This moment of triumph of the Armenian people immediately followed the deep tragedy of the Armenian genocide, which had occurred just three years before.

The new Republic of Armenia faced many challenges and lasted only two years until it was subjugated by the Soviet Red Army, but the legacy of that drive for independence strongly influenced modern Armenians, who went on to achieve lasting independence in 1991.

This week, we also mark another important event, the 10th anniversary of the passage of Parliamentary motion M-380, recognizing the tragic events of 1915 as genocide and a crime against humanity.

I look forward to joining members of Canada's Armenian community on Parliament Hill this evening to mark both of these anniversaries. My colleagues and I extend our best wishes to Canada's strong and vibrant Armenian community, and we thank its members for their important contributions to our country.

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

SUMMER IN HOCHELAGA

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with summer knocking at our door, I enthusiastically look forward to returning full time to my riding of Hochelaga, and I invite families and visitors to participate in the activities the area has to offer.

A first in North America, the Exalto park opened its doors on the Olympic Park Esplanade on the weekend. The park's high-altitude outdoor circuits will be open all summer long. This is an opportunity to go on an adventure right in the middle of the city.

The Grand Débarras will return in August to St. Catherine Street for the eighth year. This event focuses on cultural creation, responsible consumption, and sustainable development, and visitors can take in musical and street performances and enjoy family activities.

The Carnaval Estival, with its circus and free shows, and Zone HoMa, which presents young emerging artists, will attract many visitors to Hochelaga and highlight the warmth and imagination of the people living in the neighbourhood.

I must also mention our urban farmers, who are tackling food deserts by selling fresh, local products in the neighbourhood.

I wish everyone a really good summer.

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[*English*]

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am airborne today to inform the House that today is Air Force Appreciation Day on the Hill. This annual event gives parliamentarians the opportunity to honour members of the Royal Canadian Air Force for their incredible accomplishments. I encourage all members to take this opportunity to meet representatives from the RCAF to hear first-hand accounts of their experiences and to pay tribute to our airmen and airwomen for their service.

Throughout its 90-year history, the RCAF has continually demonstrated its operational excellence. Our air force makes an incalculable contribution to the protection of Canada and its citizens, to the promotion of freedom, democracy, and human rights, and to helping those in need when disaster strikes at home or anywhere around the world.

This is precisely why our government has continually supported our air force with state-of-the-art equipment. This includes new C-17 Globemaster strategic airlifters, C-130J tactical airlifters, Chinook helicopters, and upgraded CP-140 Auroras, to name a few, and new fighters are on the horizon.

I confess that this is the second-best job I will ever have. Much as I love all of my colleagues, the RCAF will always be number one. *Per ardua ad astra*.

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to voice concerns expressed to me by constituents, by Canadians who have lost their jobs, by temporary foreign workers who are arriving in Canada to terrible accommodations and lower wages than they were promised, and by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business on behalf of hundreds of small businesses across the country, including the Saravanaa Bhavan and Jalandhar Meat Shop & Tandoori in my riding. All are suffering because the Conservative government has so badly mismanaged the temporary foreign worker program.

The government has repeatedly failed to address ongoing problems and abuses within the program and now has left many employers, employees, temporary foreign workers, businesses, youth, and unemployed Canadians feeling vulnerable and worried about the future.

Desperately needed changes to this program are linked directly to much-needed changes to our immigration system overall.

Canada brings in thousands of lower-skilled temporary foreign workers each year with no pathway to permanent residence. As I have said many times before, if an individual is good enough to work here, then that individual is good enough to live here.

I urge the Conservative government to stop paying lip service to change and fix this program once and for all.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is building meaningful relationships with first nations communities through sustained engagement in resource development. The natural resources sector currently supports 32,000 first nations jobs across Canada and will result in opportunities for thousands more.

In fact, the natural resources sector is the largest private sector employer of first nations people in Canada. First nations must be partners in everything we do, from ensuring the safety of our pipeline system to protecting our marine environment from incidents. With over $650 billion in major projects anticipated over the next decade, first nations are well positioned to benefit from this enormous opportunity.

Today the Minister of Natural Resources is in British Columbia to announce our government's latest measures to further enhance engagement with first nations in the development of energy infrastructure.

We will continue to take action to ensure that all Canadians benefit from a strong resource economy and the quality jobs that come with it.

* * *

UKRAINE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege to witness first-hand last Sunday an historical moment in time for a country with an incredible history.

The people of Ukraine deserve full credit for being able to recognize the need for action, but also, more importantly, the manner in which they responded to that need.

Whether it was standing up to a president who was prepared to marginalize Ukraine's potential future or by participating in the election which they themselves precipitated, the people of Ukraine have sent a message that goes beyond the politicians and oligarchs of Ukraine. The message effectively impacted leaders around the world.

Witnessing a gentleman lift his granddaughter up with his vote in her hand as she placed it into a voting box was a touching moment for me, because it is about the future.

On behalf of my Liberal colleagues, I wish the people of Ukraine and the new president the best as they deal with issues such as EU trade and Russian diplomacy.

* * *

● (1415)

MATERNAL, NEWBORN, AND CHILD HEALTH

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the Toronto summit Saving Every Woman, Every Child: Within Arm's Reach, hosted by our Prime Minister, we take a moment to reflect that all children have the right to dream of the future with hope and optimism.

The preventable death of mothers and children in developing countries is one of the greatest tragedies of the 21st century. No mother should have to choose between herself and the health of her baby. The most recent data show us that more than six million children die in these countries before they are even five years old.

Last week I had the honour to announce that Canada would contribute $7.5 million to UNICEF for water sanitation and hygiene at schools for girls in 12 countries.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation "...congratulate Canada for working to integrate its Muskoka Initiative commitment to maternal and child survival...."

I am proud of our Prime Minister for making maternal, newborn, and child health Canada's number one development priority. Why? Because it is the right thing to do.

* * *

COMMENTS IN MEDIA

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have all had a bit of fun with the comments from the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, who was taped talking about the Liberal leader's "bozo eruptions". I know the Conservatives are having a lot of fun with the Liberal leader's gaffes and blunders, but let us keep in mind that bozo eruptions are not exclusively a Liberal thing. In fact, the Conservatives invented bozo eruptions.

Who can forget the Minister of Foreign Affairs dropping the F-bomb talking about Toronto, or the Minister of Industry's quote, "Is it my job to feed my neighbour's child? I don't think so." Who could forget the Prime Minister saying, "Canada appears content to become a second-tier socialistic country, boasting ever more loudly about its economy and social services to mask its second-rate status", or the Minister of the Environment, who denied climate change exists, or the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration calling a reporter a "Trotskyite"?

When it comes to bozo eruptions, both the red and blue teams have been showing their true colours.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first he set up partisan satellite offices with House of Commons resources; then he championed letting people vote without any form of identification. Clearly the Leader of the Opposition knows that the NDP can only win an election when rules are lax and never enforced.

Montreal's *La Presse* newspaper has uncovered the latest NDP scheme. The Quebec NDP is a registered provincial Quebec party that does not field candidates. Its leader says his priority is actually the 2015 federal elections, not provincial politics, but the provincial Quebec NDP raises money in Quebec and under Quebec election finance rules, registered provincial parties can claim up to $20,000 in subsidies from Quebec taxpayers.

The Leader of the Opposition should not use his phantom Quebec wing to quietly raise money provincially, get matching funds from Quebec taxpayers, and then cross-subsidize the federal NDP's political operations.

Will the Leader of the Opposition commit to following the rules for a change?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 25, before it was exposed that the Chief Justice had tried to warn the Prime Minister against appointing a Federal Court judge, the Prime Minister claimed that the very notion of challenging such an appointment was totally hypothetical.

Now he says he knew all along that it would be "likely to come before the Supreme Court". In fact, on May 2, he said he knew it would "definitely be coming before the courts".

Why did the Prime Minister change his version?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only changed story is from the NDP and the opposition, which had no objection to the appointment of Federal Court justices, and in fact no objection to Justice Nadon. This issue was drawn to my attention. I referred it to a range of legal experts, all of whom agreed that as had been long-standing practice, Federal Court judges were eligible for appointment to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court has now subsequently ruled, to our great surprise, that such is not the case in the case of Quebec. It is still the case elsewhere, and obviously we will follow that ruling.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has already had occasion to say, no one will ever be able to claim that she agreed with the appointment of Justice Nadon.

Let us suppose that we accept the Prime Minister's latest version, which is that he knew that this appointment would be challenged before the Supreme Court. Let us assume that this is true. If he was so sure of that, why did the Prime Minister not simply seek the opinion of the Supreme Court before appointing Justice Nadon?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the NDP critic spoke very highly of Justice Nadon, who was a well-respected jurist.

We decided to proceed with an appointment to the Supreme Court according to long-standing criteria. Our independent experts also recommended those criteria. That is why we proceeded in that way.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the Prime Minister's appointment was challenged in court, the Prime Minister tried to retroactively change the Supreme Court Act to make Judge Nadon's illegal appointment legal.

If the Prime Minister knew that this appointment would be challenged, why did he not try to change the appointment rules before appointing Judge Nadon?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, to correct the record, what the critic of the NDP said on Justice Nadon is that he was a great judge and a brilliant legal mind.

The appropriate course of action, as I said before, was to consult outside of the court with independent legal experts. They all agreed that the long-standing view that Federal Court judges were eligible should not be challenged. The government proceeded on this basis.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister indeed knew that the Nadon appointment would be challenged, as he said here in the House on May 2, why did he put the Supreme Court in the unprecedented position of having to reject an appointment? It has never happened before in the history of Canada. Why put Judge Nadon—who, by the way, is by all accounts a good human being and a competent jurist, but is just not eligible—why put him through the humiliation? Is it not the case that the only reason he did that was he was trying to strongarm the Supreme Court into accepting his illegal nomination?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the reality is that the NDP had no objection to the naming of Federal Court judges to the Supreme Court, including judges from Quebec, and no objection to the naming of Justice Nadon. The reason for that is because all parties understood, as all legal experts had long understood, that Federal Court judges were eligible. I confirmed that with various legal opinions. That is why we proceeded according to long-standing practice, and that was the appropriate course of action.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague the justice critic has had time to say again and again, no one will ever be able to say that the NDP agreed to the appointment of Nadon. No one.

[*Translation*]

Will the Prime Minister at least admit that the process for appointing judges to the Supreme Court, which he himself put in place, is not working? Will he put in place a new, transparent, non-partisan appointment process, with open consultations, to avoid another fiasco like the one he created with Justice Nadon?

● (1425)

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to repeat again what the NDP actually said about Justice Nadon: a great judge and a brilliant legal mind. I guess one could interpret that as opposition but I tend to interpret that as support.

The position of the NDP is clear that the Supreme Court has set in place new and clear eligibility criteria. The government will act within that criteria.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago when the employment minister announced the moratorium on the temporary foreign worker program he said that Canadian wages have "barely kept pace with inflation". That is understandable since, as it turns out, the minister himself approved the entry of tens of thousands of foreign workers at minimum wage.

When will the government reverse its wage-suppressing policies and fix its broken program?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one day the Liberals are calling for fewer temporary foreign workers and the next day they are calling for more temporary foreign workers, and I see similar changes on other positions.

In terms of how Canadians are doing, let me just note today the report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who notes that this government has reduced taxes for Canadians by 12%, with the greatest benefits for low- and middle-income earners, and we are seeing an increase in—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Papineau.

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are fed up with the government's botched management of the Supreme Court appointment process. Even Mr. Couillard condemned the flawed process and called for appropriate consultations.

When and how will the Prime Minister fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court bench and address the fact that Quebec is still underrepresented?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to fill the Supreme Court vacancy, the government consulted the former Quebec government about the appointment. We are now consulting with the current Quebec government. I gather that the Premier of Quebec has commented positively on the process.

[*English*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after the Prime Minister's appointment of Justice Nadon was rejected, I asked the justice minister when the government would fill Quebec's vacancy on the Supreme Court. He replied that the government would "proceed post-haste".

Over two full months have passed since that answer, so I ask this specifically. Does the Prime Minister intend to fill the existing vacancy before this House rises for the summer?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again let me just correct the record also in terms of the Liberal Party.

The Liberal Party, according to a long-standing practice, did not object to the naming of Federal Court judges to the Supreme Court and certainly did not object specifically to the naming of Judge Nadon. On the contrary, the Liberal Party was quite supportive of that.

Obviously, we have a ruling and a different set of criteria now before us, so we are acting within those criteria. As the Minister of Justice has indicated, the government will be acting in the very near future.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before appointing Marc Nadon to the Supreme Court, did the Prime Minister know that someone in his own office had asked Marc Nadon to resign from the Federal Court?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I received the opinion of a legal expert on the issue. It was not necessary. It was not my position. I appointed Mr. Nadon directly to the Supreme Court. Now the Supreme Court has provided a decision on the matter. That will change our criteria going forward.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everyone heard that the question was: who in the Prime Minister's Office told Marc Nadon to resign from the Federal Court? We have also taken note of the fact that the Prime Minister has not answered.

Let us try another one.

[*Translation*]

Which PMO staffer asked Marc Nadon to resign and renew his licence with the Barreau du Québec? Who was it? We know that it came from the Prime Minister's Office.

● (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister himself is the one who makes recommendations to the Governor General regarding Supreme Court appointments. I received an opinion on the process and acted on it.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he refuses to answer either question. Everyone can take note.

Seven months ago, I proposed that the Prime Minister work with the NDP to quickly pass legislation to protect our children from cyberbullying. To our great disappointment, the Prime Minister rejected that offer. We are now seeing an attempt to include measures that threaten Canadians' privacy under the guise of fighting cyberbullying.

I am calling on the Prime Minister to act in good faith and split the bill so that we can pass the measures to protect our children without delay.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we cannot protect our children from cyberbullying unless the police have the necessary powers to deal with such cases. That is what Bill C-13 does, and that is why I encourage the NDP to support our children.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a growing list of groups, including the Canadian Bar Association, have called on Conservatives to split the bill. Even the mother of Amanda Todd, who took her own life in a tragic case of cyberbullying, has called for this bill to be split, saying, "We should not have to sacrifice our children's privacy rights to make them safe...".

Will the Prime Minister finally listen, agree to split this bill, and give our children the protection they deserve on all fronts?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP knows full well that we cannot protect people by mere declarations. We must also give the authorities the ability to actually investigate and prosecute offences under the law. That is what this bill does, and I note that it has the overwhelming support of not only victims and police, but of the Canadian population.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been trying to brush off evidence that his department broke the rules. He claimed that only live-in caregivers and farm workers were approved to work at minimum wage, but there were also cooks, waiters, dry cleaners, fitness instructors, hairdressers, hotel clerks, janitors, cashiers, and event planners. Almost all of them were paid less than the prevailing wage, against the rules, and were being approved this year.

Instead of denial, can the minister actually explain to Canadians why he let his department break the rules?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): First of all, Mr. Speaker, decisions on labour market opinions are made by highly trained, unfettered decision makers with delegated authority. Second, they did not break the rules. Third, the member is completely wrong as 98.67% of the cases to which she refers were in the seasonal agricultural worker program or the live-in caregiver program where they were paid at the appropriate wage at that time. Of the other 1.3% of cases, they were also paid at the established prevailing median wage rate, which happened, in those instances, to be at the minimum wage level.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even chambers of commerce, like in Fort McMurray, Alberta, are unhappy with Conservative mismanagement of this program.

Last year, there were at least 250 documented complaints from temporary foreign workers about mistreatment. Do members know how many of them ended up on the famous employer blacklist? Not one. The minister finally blacklisted four companies last month, after bad headlines. Why have rules if we are not going to enforce them?

Will the minister finally call an independent audit review to fix the program?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact last year we passed legislation, which the NDP voted against, to create the new, more effective blacklist, which is now being used, and to create the new enforcement and oversight division at Service Canada, which is leading to spot checks and audits and has given us the authorization to go on work sites, to look at the paperwork, and to penalize non-compliant employers.

The question I have for New Democrats is, why did they oppose those new powers? Why did they oppose the blacklist and why are they now opposing the budget implementation act, which would give us the authority to impose additional tough administrative and monetary penalties on non-compliant employers?

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the temporary foreign worker program is so poorly managed by the Conservatives that some employers use it in order to abuse it.

Although the Conservative government received 250 complaints last year, only four employers were placed on the blacklist. There is reason to believe that the problem is even more serious, because only three provinces track complaints made by the workers.

When will the Minister of Employment finally admit that his temporary foreign worker program is a fiasco and needs to be completely overhauled?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the program has been in existence for several decades. It is not my program.

That said, this government is making major reforms to combat abuses of the program. That is why we introduced amendments to the legislation that went into effect last December to give us the power to investigate employers. That is why additional powers are included in the budget implementation bill.

I urge the NDP to support that bill in order to give us the powers we need.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): We are not finished yet, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Minister of Employment claimed that the data in a study on temporary foreign workers were out of date, whereas in reality, the study was on the last 18 months of Conservative rule. He claimed that the problems with wages were limited to live-in caregivers and agricultural workers, but that is wrong.

Instead of attacking the messenger, the minister would do well to examine his conscience and come to us with a complete reform, not just a patch job, as the Liberals so often did before the Conservatives.

When are they going to repair the damage that they themselves caused?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the figures show that what I said yesterday is perfectly correct. In fact, 99% of the cases she is referring to were in the seasonal agricultural workers program and the live-in caregiver program.

In the other 1% of cases, the going wage was the minimum wage. That means that officials made the right decisions, according to the rules. However, we are tightening the rules to make sure that Canadians come first in our labour market and that there will be serious consequences for employers who do not comply with the rules.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after sabotaging and then killing the Public Appointments Commission, the Conservatives have yet again been caught in more pork patronage. Today's accountability report shows that John Lynn, the hand-picked head of Enterprise Cape Breton of the Minister of Justice, was stuffing the Crown corporation with Conservative friends.

> Mr. Lynn's actions were incompatible with the trust that the Government of Canada and the public has placed in him as Chief Executive Officer.

When will the Minister of Justice and a Conservative senior minister for Nova Scotia come clean in his role in this?

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, meanwhile New Democrats are busy using taxpayers dollars for election purposes to staff partisan offices. When will they be accountable for their own actions?

We take accountability on this side. I have taken steps to terminate Mr. Lynn's employment. I accept the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner's findings, and ECBC has already implemented his recommendation.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative infrastructure promises are crumbling faster than Canada's roads and bridges. The Building Canada fund has been chopped this year by nearly 90%. To add to this, the government is now forcing provinces to do a further review of municipal applications, creating more red tape and delaying projects until the next federal election, just in time for the photo op.

Will the Prime Minister reverse the 90% cut, streamline the process, and get shovels into the ground now?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a former mayor, I know that with the former Liberal government, there were no shovels in the ground. There are shovels in the ground. Here we are in power, and we will continue to work on that.

That is completely false. Completely false. I can tell members that there will be shovels in the ground this summer, because the former plan will continue to roll, and we have a new plan ready for business.

We already announced yesterday, in Edmonton, an LRT project, a really good one. We will continue to do so.

* * *

● (1440)

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, three years ago the immigration department set up a blacklist for companies abusing temporary foreign workers, a good idea in theory, but can members guess how many companies have been blacklisted so far? Zero.

We could have all the legislative powers in the world, but if we do not do anything with these powers, we do not achieve anything. Will the Conservatives finally commit to regular inspections of the workplace?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as evidence of how we are constantly trying to improve this program, we recognized that the blacklist put in place three years ago was not meeting its objective, because it was entirely prospective, so we brought in a new blacklist based on legislative authorities last year, which now allows us to make decisions retrospectively and for employers currently abusing the program.

What is the interesting thing? The Liberal Party voted against those new powers. The Liberal Party voted against cracking down on abusive employers, and the Liberal Party has inundated us with requests to overturn decisions not to bring in TFWs.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that the Liberals have voted against the government on this program, because it has made such a monumental mess out of it.

As for cancelling that program, the website today says it still exists. The website today says no employers are on the list. It is obvious that it is under the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. It is his department. Why does he do nothing to enforce the rules? Why does he have nobody inspecting companies to detect such abuse?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remember back in the day, in opposition, a critic actually used to try to know his file. He would try to research the facts. The member is absolutely wrong.

The blacklist deals with employers applying for labour market opinions from Service Canada, which is an ESD agency. I am pleased to say that since December last, we have put in place a meaningful blacklist. We are now adding abusive employers to it.

I regret that the Liberal Party opposed it, and I regret that its high-water mark in the administration of the TFW program was Strippergate.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, premiers in Atlantic Canada understand their region. They know what their economies need to grow and flourish. They are unanimous that the changes the federal government made to EI without any consultation are damaging to our region's economy.

Why are the Conservatives so allergic to working with the provinces, and why will they not sit down with them now and agree to fix the problems they have created with these changes?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we work closely with provinces on matters of joint jurisdiction. The employment insurance program is an area of federal jurisdiction. We administer the program to ensure that it is there for Canadians when they lose their jobs through no fault of their own and they cannot find employment at their skill level in their local area.

We made some modest changes last year to remind folks that they do have an obligation to actively search for available work at their skill level in their local area. The report shows clearly that there was not a negative impact on local workers in Atlantic Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the integrity commissioner has confirmed that the Conservatives used the Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation to make partisan appointments. They hired four Conservatives without a competition, including the Minister of Justice's former chief of staff.

It is always the same thing with the Liberals and Conservatives: they give jobs at crown corporations to their buddies and they cut employment insurance for regular people.

When will the Minister of Justice give an explanation for the appointment of his former chief of staff?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we believe in accountability. I have already mentioned to the hon. member's colleagues that we have taken steps to terminate Mr. Lynn's employment.

On the other hand, what does the NDP have to say about its using taxpayers' dollars for election purposes to staff partisan offices? When will they take accountability for their own actions?

* * *

● (1445)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not just a big corporation, like the Conservatives.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday the Atlantic premiers once again denounced the employment insurance reform. The Conservatives do not care about the Atlantic provinces or people in Atlantic Canada. They made changes to EI without consulting the public or the businesses that need seasonal workers and are now deprived of skilled workers. In the meantime, the hiring of temporary foreign workers has exploded.

When will the Conservatives start implementing policies to help the people of New Brunswick, and when will they cancel the EI reform, which hurts workers?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the member who said last year that the minor changes made to the EI program would eliminate all benefits for seasonal workers. He said these changes would spell the end of our communities. He was absolutely wrong.

The figures show that the changes were very minor and they encouraged some people to more actively look for work in their region. We need to reduce employers' dependence on temporary foreign workers. That is why we will continue to manage the EI program to ensure that it is available for the unemployed workers who need it.

* * *

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives seem to think that the best way to deal with out-of-control patronage at Enterprise Cape Breton is to fire the guy who got the patronage in the first place, but nowhere do Conservatives take responsibility for the pork patronage.

Do Conservatives really expect Canadians to believe that hiring well-connected Conservatives was all John Lynn's idea? It is time for some accountability. The minister has said that it is time to terminate Mr. Lynn's appointment, so I have a simple question. What severance package, what amount of severance, can Mr. Lynn expect?

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already mentioned twice to the hon. member's colleagues—he should listen to his colleague's questions in question period, by the way—we accept the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner's findings, and ECBC has already implemented his recommendations. In fact, the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner acknowledges in his report that ECBC has already taken action and implemented a new recruitment and selection process, a policy that clearly incorporates fairness and transparency in the staffing process.

* * *

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians save, spend, and invest their money, they should be assured that their interests come first. That is why our government has taken significant action to protect Canadian consumers, including imposing a mandatory 21-day interest-free grace period on credit cards, banning unsolicited credit card cheques, and introducing new requirements for prepaid credit cards.

Could the Minister of Finance please update the House on our government's latest in promoting our consumer-first agenda?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Provencher for asking the question. I am very happy to announce an agreement with Canada's eight largest chartered banks to expand no-cost banking services for more than seven million Canadians. This will help vulnerable and low-income Canadians gain access to essential banking services at a reasonable cost.

Our government puts consumers first. Just today, the parliamentary budgetary office confirmed that we have delivered more than $30 billion in tax relief to Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many experts in many fields have told us that the Conservatives' last budget bill was flawed and that it hurt Canadian companies.

This time, dozens of chambers of commerce, companies such as Giant Tiger, and industrial groups have called for the changes to the Trade-marks Act to be removed from the government's budget bill. No one is in a better position to understand the actual impact of the Conservatives' whims.

Will the minister listen to the business community and remove the changes to the Trade-marks Act from his budget bill?

● (1450)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the changes to trademark are very important for small and medium-sized businesses across Canada.

[*English*]

What we are doing in Bill C-31 is enacting three international protocols that protect the interests of small businesses on the international scene. These three treaties will allow Canadians who work in the IT sector and those who are dependent on their intellectual property on the world stage not to have to hire 50 and 60 lawyers around the world but to hire one.

When a patent is registered in Canada, it will be recognized on the world stage so that Canadians who are investing in intellectual property will be protected on a global level, not just a Canadian level.

I understand that the Canadian Bar Association does not like it, but it is because it is good for small business.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us expand that list with people who know something about small business a little, like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, or about export, like the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, who joined the Canadian Bar Association in raising concerns about these dramatic changes to trademark policy.

I know the Minister of Finance will not get up and defend his own budget act, because he knows how bad it is, so he will pass it over to someone else. I wonder if he has listened at all to the member for Lanark—Carleton, who of course sits on the family business board of Giant Target, who also wrote this minister, arguing against the changes to trademark.

Will he at least listen to his Conservative colleagues if not to Canadian businesses?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, these changes absolutely benefit small businesses.

These treaties, by the way, were signed back in 2001. It is our government that is taking action to implement them. They protect the interests of small businesses.

It is true there are those, of course, in the Canadian Bar Association, others who represent lawyers and patent lawyers, who want to be able to charge small businesses $3,500 to $5,000 to register patents in 20, 40, 50 countries around the world.

We stand with small businesses. We stand with those businesses that are dependent on intellectual property so that they can have their patents registered in Canada and recognized on the global level so that they can move forward and engage and be successful on the international scene.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister once claimed that accountability will be the key to the Muskoka initiative, but as with so many aspects of the Conservatives' G8 summit, accountability is missing. Experts have found that the Canadian government has failed to live up to the accountability standards the Prime Minister has demanded from the rest of the world.

The department says that information will not be available for years. How can Canada expect accountability from other countries when it will not even practise it itself?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are very proud. A summit will be held in Toronto from May 28-30.

I can tell members that key stakeholders, like Rosemary McCarney, said, and I quote:

> Canada came out of the gate when MDG 4 and 5 were the worst performing MDGs, and Canada said we're going do something about that, and get our G8 partners onto it, and kept going.

It was the same thing from David Morley, of UNICEF Canada, when he recently praised our efforts, saying:

> The Government of Canada, a global leader in maternal, newborn and child health...

This is leadership. This is the impact and good results.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada required the organizations that were receiving funding under the Muskoka initiative to be accountable. However, as pointed out in the prestigious journal *The Lancet*, the Conservative government is not capable of being accountable itself when it comes to how much money is being spent and how it is being spent.

On the eve of a new summit on development assistance in Toronto, what measures are the Conservatives going to put in place to ensure that the mistakes that were made in implementing the Muskoka initiative do not happen again?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the results of the Muskoka initiative. Canada committed to $1.1 billion in new spending above and beyond its original commitment, for a total of $2.85 billion over five years. The Prime Minister is known for keeping his commitments: 80% of the money has been paid out and we are going to meet our targets for 2015. We want to continue to do more.

We want to tell stakeholders all over the world to join us because we know that the number of children across the world who died before their fifth birthday dropped by 700,000 between 2010 and 2011. We estimate that 2 million children died as a result of preventable illnesses between 2010 and 2013. I have a lot of convincing statistics.

* * *

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government must acknowledge that current estimates show that maternal and newborn child health outcomes for aboriginal women and infants are two to four times worse than the Canadian average.

It is sad that even though the Prime Minister co-chairs the UN committee on accountability for women's and children's health, Canada itself has very weak data for first nations, Inuit, and Métis outcomes.

Why has the government that purports to have leadership in maternal, newborn, and child health refused to deal with its own embarrassing record here in Canada?

● (1455)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that is completely inaccurate. In fact, we do a great deal to promote Canada perinatal nutrition programs, improving the health and well-being of pregnant women, new mothers and babies all across Canada, in particular on first nations. Every year this program provides 59,000 new moms across Canada in over 2,000 communities with important nutritional and health information.

We are also investing $2.5 billion every year in aboriginal health initiatives, including projects to improve the access to midwife services and prenatal care. We will continue to work hard on that issue.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Public Integrity Commissioner ruled today that John Lynn made four blatantly partisan Conservative patronage hirings. After this damning report, the minister was forced to fire Mr. Lynn.

In light of the seriousness of this offence, will the minister now go further and ensure that the patronage appointees that Mr. Lynn hired are not rolled into the professional, independent, non-partisan public service?

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we think of the source of that question, the party that member represents was the inspiration, in fact, for the Federal Accountability Act, when in 2006 the Public Service Commission reported that the Liberals gave ministerial aides free rides into the public service. We ended that. We brought in the Federal Accountability Act. We believe in accountability, and we have acted.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in November, in response to the devastating Typhoon Haiyan, the government promised to fast-track some visa applications, but here we are six months later and the department refuses to say what happened to those applications.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration needs to take this issue seriously and start answering some questions. How many visas were approved, how many were fast-tracked, how many were rejected, and how many are still in process? These are basic questions. Why can the minister not stand and answer them?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of Canada's leadership in response to Typhoon Haiyan. The generosity of Canadians was extraordinary, and we are very proud, as a government, to have matched those funds, over $160 million, earning the thanks of the President of the Philippines and the people of the Philippines. We were among the very few countries, probably the only country, to have opened its doors to urgent immigration cases. Well over 1,000 Filipinos benefited from approvals in those cases.

We will continue to work to make our visa relations with the Philippines one of the best in the world.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we still do not have the answers to our questions. We know that the minister has made some nice announcements in the media, but has he really delivered the results he promised?

Typhoon Haiyan caused major damage and left thousands of families grieving. The government cannot announce a fast-track visa program and then abandon the people who were promised help. Canada's Filipino community is worried and the government is not being transparent on this file.

Today I am asking the minister to give us the facts. When will the applications under this special program all be processed?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed to see an honourable colleague deny the generosity of the Canadian people and of our immigration programs.

Canadians were extraordinarily generous, and our government matched their donations. This is unprecedented in our relations with the Philippines.

Furthermore, we have processed and approved the applications of more than 1,000 Filipinos who wanted to come to Canada. Canada responded generously to this catastrophe.

* * *

● (1500)

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of interest in the use of psychiatric service dogs to assist veterans who are suffering from mental health conditions, particularly post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. I have heard from veterans across the country what a significant contribution these animals make to their well-being.

Would the Minister of Veterans Affairs please inform the House on what action our government is taking to assess the significance of the benefits that these psychiatric service animals are having in the treatment of our veterans suffering from PTSD?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have also heard from Captain Medric Cousineau and many other veterans, which is why today I was pleased to announce that our government would support a two and a half year pilot project that would provide service dogs for up to 50 veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The $500,000 will cover the cost of expenses and new research for the initiative.

As well, I thank Medric and Thai and so many other veterans for bringing this forward. I am glad that our government continues to deliver for our veterans and their families.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is spending $100,000 on each wasteful, self-promoting ad aired during the playoffs. Only 6% of the population even notice.

Thirty-five fewer ads would fund the nine VAC offices the government closed last fall. A mere 17 fewer ads would allow Veterans Affairs to invest in a military skills translator like the U.S. uses to help find good jobs for its vets. Veterans do not need propaganda during the intermissions; they need services.

Will the minister finally stop using our tax dollars promoting his government instead of helping our veterans?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only useless comment is that which I just heard.

Canadian veterans need to know they have financial support available in addition to their rehabilitation and mental health support they need when they need it. I will let that member explain to veterans why we should not be informing them of important support programs available to them and their families.

If these reports and the criticism that we hear day in and day out are accurate, I would like to ask that member to stand with us and help us when we promote veterans and budget issues for their needs and their families.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is about government support for diversity.

Today, MPs on this side of the House welcome Jer's Vision and a group of LGBTQ youth to Rainbow Day on the Hill. This day represents an opportunity to start breaking down the barriers that prevent LGBTQ youth from participating in politics. At the same time, it provides an opportunity for us to celebrate diversity on the Hill.

Let us show that we all value inclusiveness in the House and that we can unite despite our partisan differences.

Will the government now join us in a round of applause in appreciation of all those who participated in Rainbow Day on the Hill this year?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I do not know if that is the answer. Anyway, no one seems to be rising to answer it.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, beginning tomorrow in Toronto, Canada will host the maternal, newborn and child health summit, an international summit that will build on Canada's leadership and shape the future of global action on maternal and child health issues. To date, the Canadian-led Muskoka initiative has saved countless lives and improved the health of millions of mothers, newborns and children in the developing world.

Could the Minister of Health please update the House on our government's latest efforts to improve maternal and child health around the world?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Prime Minister, improving the health of mothers and newborns is Canada's top development priority. We have seen great progress so far. In fact, we have seen two million lives saved since 2010, but we must continue to make progress for mothers around the world.

That is why last week, while attending the World Health Assembly, I was pleased to announce funding of $36 million to support research in nine African countries, which aims to improve primary health care for mothers and young children. By working

together, eliminating preventable deaths among women, children and newborns is truly within arm's reach.

* * *

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a resident of Charlesbourg, Gregory Ashodian, mysteriously disappeared in Jamaica in December 2013. Despite an intense search in Jamaica, his family has not been able to locate him, and the local police investigation is stalled. The Ashodian family is looking for answers and, above all, for help with its search.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us if he is aware of this situation and in contact with his Jamaican counterpart? Can he tell us what assistance Canada is providing to the Ashodian family in Jamaica?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the most important priorities we have is to support Canadians abroad. I would be very pleased to work with the member opposite on this case and on any other case that might be important to her or to her constituents.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Justice a question about the National Assembly's dying with dignity bill. Instead of agreeing to respect that societal choice, which has received widespread support throughout Quebec and is the result of a process that was lauded by stakeholders for its thoroughness, the minister is imposing the House's will on the Quebec nation and is implying that the Criminal Code will prevent Quebec from moving forward.

How can the Minister of Justice continue to oppose Quebeckers' desire to grant the right to die with dignity?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House voted on this issue four years ago. Our government has no intention of reopening debate on the topic. It is that simple.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked a question and at the end of my question, an NDP member shouted, “Bad question.”

I am surprised that after three years here, he does not know that every question asked in the House is a good question. It is the answers that are bad.

S. O. 57

[*English*]

The Speaker: That seems to be a matter of debate and not a point of order.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the New Democratic House leader raised a question in which I think he was making reference to me. He referred to me as the member for Lanark—Carleton, and indicated that I am on the board of directors of a company called "Giant Target".

I want to inform the member that I was the member for Lanark—Carleton before that riding ceased to exist a decade ago, about the same time he arrived here, and I am not on the board of directors of Giant Target but of Giant Tiger. Rumours of our merger with Target are overstated.

On the positive side, I believe that if he wants to take out a trademark for the name "Giant Target", it is available.

The Speaker: I am sure the House appreciates the clarification.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is also rising.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for my friend across the way, I apologize for misnaming the company of which he sits on the board of directors.

I, of course, am not the House leader for the opposition anymore. I am finance critic. My paycheque has shown me that. I would show him my pay stubs if he needs any kind of confirmation, but I feel quite comfortable with the role that I take on as finance critic.

I am glad that the merger is not happening, and I am glad that he still has his position on the board. I wish him good luck with the Minister of Finance and his lobbying against the new changes to the Copyright Act.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to the consideration of Government Business No. 10, the debate not be further adjourned.

● (1510)

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period. I would ask members who wish to participate to keep their questions to around one minute and responses to a similar length.

The hon. opposition House leader.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP are always ready to work. Last year, the government tried the same trick. However, if we look at the debates that took place every evening in June, sometimes 90%, even up to 95%, of those who came to work and discuss bills were NDP members. That is a record we are very proud of. We are here to work, no question about it.

However, this motion is a licence for laziness. Not only do the Conservatives not come to speak in the House, but now there is also talk of holding no votes in the evening. The votes will be held around question period. Of course, the Conservatives want to prevent the opposition from using the procedures that we are familiar with. That is not democracy as I see it.

[*English*]

I am interested in why the government House leader did not raise this at the House leaders meeting. We are supposed to be meeting shortly.

The NDP has always said that this is the kind of stuff that should be talked about around the table. There was no consultation with the opposition and, of course, no consultation with the Conservative caucus either.

My questions are very simple. Why did the member not consult with the opposition? Why did he not consult with his caucus? Why is he trying to ram this through the House one more time without doing the consultations that are really the hallmark of Canadian democracy?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, of course, the great consultation we are having with the House is the consultation we are having right now, in which we are debating the motion and hopefully allowing the opportunity for many more consultations in this House.

The last time we were up dealing with the matter of this motion, and I was answering questions on the motion itself, the member had a lot to say about speeches. Apparently he had been counting who had been delivering speeches. I think this House, and perhaps the public, might have been left with the mistaken impression that the New Democrats were participating vigorously in debate and Conservatives had not been last spring when we had extended hours just like this.

I actually took a look at those statistics, which I had not done before that debate, and discovered that in fact on those days—and there were 20 of them between the Victoria Day break and the end of session last time—on 11 of those 20 days, Conservatives actually spoke more often. More Conservatives gave speeches than New Democrats. There were only five days in which New Democrats gave more speeches than Conservatives.

Therefore, it seems very odd to me that the member is trying to suggest that Conservatives were not speaking. The fact is that, overwhelmingly, on the majority of those days, it was actually Conservatives who spoke more often than New Democrats.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things to be very clear on is that the Liberal Party is not fearful of work. We are quite anxious to ensure that there is a good deal of debate on many and a wide variety of pieces of legislation. Having extended hours is something that, from a personal point of view and from our party's point of view, can be of great value to Canadians.

However, I want to highlight and ask the government House leader why it is—and I have been in a position where I have had to negotiate and talk about House processes and how a House should proceed, in terms of passing legislation—that this particular government House leader has not been able to sit down with the opposition House leaders from the Liberal Party and from the NDP to try to work out some sort of timely debate on a series of legislation, as opposed to always wanting to use time allocation.

I for one do not mind sitting. For as long as they want to sit, I am prepared to sit. However, whatever happened to good-faith negotiation on legislation, so that we could do things in a timely fashion, so that important bills are in fact being appropriately debated, such as the fair elections act, which was really restricted in terms of its debate? Why not negotiate in good faith?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from the Liberal Party for that question because, in fairness, without disclosing what happens in our behind-closed-door negotiations, I can say I actually enjoy a very positive relationship in which we do have a very constructive exchange with the Liberal Party. I have to say that those experiences are very positive. Indeed, we do have very constructive negotiations, and there is an understanding of how government works and the need to approach it properly. I commend the Liberals for the way in which they have approached such discussions and negotiations.

Obviously, not everybody comes to the table with the same attitude and, as a result, we have to adopt other measures.

However, the reason for it is that we are trying to deliver on commitments we have made to Canadians, important commitments, commitments like delivering on our budget and our budget implementation bill, which was an important part, for example, of ensuring that Canada remains an economic leader by delivering a budget that is in balance in 2015. We have been lucky to enjoy coming out of the economic downturn in the strongest fiscal position of any of the major developed economies. Our budget bill would allow us to continue to enjoy such a strong position, help ensure that Canada continues to lead in job growth as a result of that, and keep taxes down. As we heard today, Canadians are paying 12% less in taxes today than they were many years ago, as a result of the tax reductions made by this government. That means everybody's standard of living in Canada is higher than it was before, thanks to our policies.

● (1515)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think what the Conservative House leader has just said is what Canadians already know. The Liberals basically roll over any time the Conservatives have to push their agenda through. That is increasingly what Canadians are saying across the country. Perhaps that is why the leader of the Liberal Party only shows up one-third of the time to question period, while the leader of the official opposition is here every day, holding the government to account, which is the way it should be.

I want to come back to the issue of time allocation and closure because the government House leader loves to throw this around. At one time, though, prior to the Conservatives actually coming into government, they actually felt that debate was important.

I want to quote what the Prime Minister said on December 9, 2002, prior to the Conservative majority:

> We have closure today precisely because there is no deadline and there are no plans. Instead of having deadlines, plans and goals, we must insist on moving forward because the government is simply increasingly embarrassed by the state of the debate and it needs to move on.

That was the Prime Minister in 2002. If we fast-forward to 2014, he is putting in place every bad habit that we saw from the former corrupt Liberal government.

My question is quite simple. The Conservatives have now brought in closure and time allocation 64 times. It is a record. It is even as bad as the former Liberal government's was.

Are the Conservatives not just a bit ashamed of themselves? Rather than consulting with the opposition, rather than consulting with their caucus, all they know how to do is impose closure and shut down debate.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, this is actually one of the rare occasions when we actually are dealing with a closure motion. We have had just a handful of them in our Parliament.

The reason the member's numbers are so high is that we do not use time allocation in the fashion he has suggested. We use it as a scheduling device. In some cases we have been criticized by the opposition for utilizing time allocation and allocating more time than was necessary for a bill to be debated. That is because we want to ensure we make our best assessment of how much time will be needed for a bill to proceed, to allow a full and adequate debate and to allow decisions to be made. It also creates certainty in members' schedules, so they can plan to be in attendance when a vote happens and not be taken by surprise.

That kind of orderly approach has delivered us a productive, hard-working Parliament that has delivered real results in advancing Canadians' priorities, which we delivered to them in the last election. Those priorities are ensuring our focus is on the economy, job creation, and long-term prosperity; ensuring we are delivering safer communities for Canadians by tackling crime and by rebalancing our justice system to improve the rights of victims; making sure we are opening Canada's markets abroad for Canadian workers, employers, and businesses, so they can export goods and create jobs here in Canada and create greater prosperity here in Canada.

These are all items that stand ahead of us in the weeks ahead, when we can support and advance the legislative agenda in further steps: the actual proposals that we have delivered to Canadians, that Canadians say are important to them.

The irony of it all is that we are talking about a motion that would allow more debate, allow more sitting to occur, allow more discussion of bills to happen, allow more decisions to be taken, and allow more bills to be passed through certain stages. This is all productive hard work that Canadians want to see. Those who complain about any lack of debate should obviously want to see more debate and will support the motion, I am sure.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons says that this is a closure motion, but that the Conservatives are not as bad because they use time allocation motions most often. This is nonetheless one more closure motion on top of the other 64 times the Conservatives have used closure and time allocation.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said that time allocation was different, so let me quote what his leader, the Prime Minister, said on June 12, 1995:

> Madam Speaker, this will be the only opportunity I have to address Bill C-68 in the Chamber. I was not able to speak to the bill at second reading because there was time allocation then. Now there is time allocation at report stage and time allocation again at third reading. There has been time allocation at every stage of the bill. It is unfortunate that in the end most members will be lucky to have 10 minutes to speak to this bill.

The Prime Minister, who was only a member then, said that time allocation was just as unacceptable as closure. Now the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is saying that time allocation is not as bad. However, the Prime Minister said the opposite.

How can the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons account for the fact that his leader, the Prime Minister, criticized the abuse of time allocation when the corrupt Liberals were in power?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, it all comes down to the technique or the way in which the device is utilized. One could utilize time allocation to shut down debate immediately. As I said, our approach has been entirely different. We use it as a scheduling device to create certainty, so members know when bills are going to be debated and they can come to debate them at those times. They will know when votes will take place, and this will create certainty.

The result is, under this government, some of the longest amounts of time allocated to the debate of bills in the history of Canadian Parliament. We have had, for example, four of the longest debates ever under time allocation on budget implementation bills.

It is not a question of inadequate time for debate but rather a question of how it is utilized. If it is used in a different fashion to try to limit debate rather than as a scheduling device, then we would have the kind of events that provoked the response we heard from the Prime Minister, but that has not been the approach of this government.

This government's approach has been one of using it as a device for certainty, for productivity, to let us get things done on the economy, on tackling crime, on opening markets abroad to Canadians and Canadian workers and businesses, so they can create jobs and achieve prosperity. It is all about delivering results and, at the end of the day, that is what this is about.

The bottom line difference is that the NDP would like us to never come to any conclusions, to never have to make any decisions, just to have endless filibusters, whereas members on this side of the House are more interested in getting things done, and from what I hear, the Liberals are as well. That is why they support the motion, so we can make decisions, so we can get things done, so we can deliver results for Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, let us look at the results. In 2013, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce said not only are 300,000 more people unemployed in this country, but also what jobs the Conservatives were able to create, 95% of them were part-time jobs. We have Canadians increasingly struggling to make ends meet.

Last month's unemployment figures lost tens of thousands of jobs across this country. How do we know? The manufacturing sector lost 500,000 jobs that were good family-sustaining jobs. What the Conservatives have done is created some part-time jobs for those folks who lost their full-time jobs. Of course, they have the record in terms of creating jobs for temporary foreign workers, but we know what a colossal amount of chaos and debacle the mismanagement of the temporary foreign worker program has been.

Conservatives used to talk about democracy before they became entitled and forgot about their actual electors. The former minister of justice, a Conservative, said this when speaking of the corrupt Liberals who were doing the same kinds of things that the Conservatives condemned at the time. He said on November 28, 2001:

> Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister of Canada swung an axe across the throat of parliament....members of all parties in parliament lost the ability to express the concerns of Canadians....why did the Prime Minister do the wrong thing by invoking closure?

I think we are getting a body of evidence now that shows very clearly that Conservatives, when they were condemning the corrupt Liberals, acted quite differently than how they are acting now. They condemned those Liberals when they were at the end of their regime, just before they were tossed out by the Canadian public. I guess if anything is encouraging, it is the fact that we are seeing the end of this regime. Increasingly when we look at Conservatives, we are seeing a government that is in disarray and has to use these types of methods, the steamrollers, to try to force through legislation.

The problem is that their legislation is increasingly rejected by courts. The Supreme Court has rejected a number of pieces of legislation even over the last few weeks. We have seen other cases where time allocation or closure has led to Conservatives ramming something through that was so bad they had to bring other legislation to fix the problems that were in the first piece of legislation.

My question for the government House leader is very simple. Why did he not consult with the opposition? Why did he not consult with his caucus? Why is he setting up the same kind of situation where the Conservatives try to ram through legislation that is after the fact rejected by the courts? The Conservatives have to then spend more House time introducing new legislation to fix the old legislation that had real flaws but because there was no debate and accepting of amendments from the opposition, the government ends up spending more parliamentary time fixing the errors it made. Why did the government not just consult with the opposition? Why did it not consult with its own caucus members?

● (1525)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am most puzzled by the question just delivered by my hon. friend. It bears very little relation to anything that is actually taking place on our legislative agenda. As far as I can tell, there is only potentially one bill in the months ahead that would deal with correcting laws that had been struck down by the courts and that would be the invitation by the Supreme Court for us in the Bedford decision to make changes to the prostitution laws that it has found unconstitutional and contrary to the charter.

The member said that is because they were rammed through by a Conservative government. I guess in some sense he may be correct because the bulk of those laws were put in place in 1892 when it was a Conservative government in place. I believe it was Prime Minister John Thompson who as the minister of justice was responsible for the comprehensive reform of the Criminal Code at the time. I will say in fairness to the prime minister at the time in 1892, that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was not yet in place. The changes he did bring into place, the legislation did seem to withstand any kind of court challenge for at least a century. Any response that we may bring legislatively can hardly be said to be responding to a bill that was brought in rashly, rammed through, and thrown out by the courts a century plus a couple of decades later. I really think it is a very bizarre kind of characterization of what we might be doing legislatively.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for our House leader, Mr. Van Loan.

The Speaker: Order, please. I will just remind the member that he had it right when he said House leader, but then he went a bit too far because we do not—

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Speaker, there are two House leaders here. I apologize.

● (1530)

The Speaker: The government House leader is sufficient for the House.

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Speaker, the question is regarding Bill C-17, Vanessa's law. I am trying to understand what these extended hours will mean with respect to Bill C-17.

As the House knows, Vanessa's law will, among other things, empower the Minister of Health to order dangerous drugs that are harming Canadians off the market immediately, change labels, give better safety warnings, and so forth.

The timeliness of this bill is important. For example, we know that there are hundreds of patients in Canada who suffer serious adverse drug reactions daily. That is what this bill is designed to address. If this bill is passed sooner, without a word of exaggeration it will save lives. It will protect Canadians from serious adverse drug reactions.

I did not count how many NDP members spoke in support of the bill today. I think it was 10 or more. The New Democrats are supporting the bill in principle. They want to get it to committee to talk about amendments. I would love to get it to committee to talk about amendments, but we did not get the direction or agreement from the NDP House leader today to send it to committee. We need to do that soon in order to get it through committee, passed in the House of Commons, and sent to the Senate for consideration before the end of June.

Therefore, I would ask the government House leader this. What do these extended hours mean with respect to Bill C-17, Vanessa's law?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I know this is an issue in which the hon. member has taken a great interest for obvious reasons and has been a champion. It is fair to say that if it was not for his leadership and initiative, we would not have the opportunity to be debating this particular bill on the floor of the House of Commons today.

What was disappointing to me today was, contrary to what we had been led to believe and the impression I had this morning, we did not succeed in getting the debate to a conclusion today. This is one of the difficulties we find. We debated the number of speakers people have put up. According to the NDP, there was some virtue in the fact that they have had more speakers in the evenings, even though the statistics are quite different than that when we look at the fullness of debate.

Our approach is to let those who feel passionately about it have their say, allow the debate to occur, but also allow a decision to be made, allow a vote to happen, allow a bill to proceed to the next stage.

This is an important bill. These extended hours will give us the opportunity to get it to the next stage because clearly simply relying on the good faith of the opposition to allow it to proceed to the next stage is not sufficient. That is why we have to sometimes take unusual steps with our process to allow that to happen. Members should keep in mind that we are only talking about getting it to second reading in the House of Commons.

I often take school visits and school groups through the stages of getting a bill adopted. I explain that it has to go to committee to be studied, to have witnesses heard, and then be put to a vote. It then comes back to the House for report stage and to be voted on there. There will then be a further debate in the House at third reading and be put to a vote. I then say, “Is it a law now?” They all say yes. Then I say, “No. Guess what? It then has to go to the Senate for all the same things all over again”. Then they realize that there are indeed many hurdles and safeguards.

If we want to get bills passed, if we want to get changes in place and get Bill C-17 in place, it requires a real commitment from all of us to put our shoulder to the wheel and get things done. That is what this motion would allow us to do on Bill C-17 and a number of other bills that are before us that Canadians want to see us deliver results on.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about time allocation, what the government is doing is preventing certain fairly controversial areas of debate from being thoroughly debated.

Let me give a few examples of the government bringing in time allocation. We can talk about the major budget bills, where there are changes being made to literally 30 or 40 pieces of legislation, and it allowed a few hours of debate. For the Canadian Wheat Board, it allowed a few hours of debate before closing down the Wheat Board. We can talk about the pooled pension plan, copyright legislation, many pieces of first nations legislation, and a series of critically important legislation where the government has brought in time allocation. Every time it brings in time allocation, it is preventing an adequate amount of debate and opportunity for members of both sides of the House to be engaged and hold the minister and government accountable for what they are trying to bring in in terms of legislation.

My question is for the government House leader. I think the government has used time allocation 60 times. That is 60-plus hours that have been allocated between questions and answers and bell ringing. That is a lot of debate that could have happened, much like right now when we are having questions and then we will likely have the bells ring. Why do we not just do the work, and if we have to sit longer, we sit longer? We are not shy of sitting longer in the House.

● (1535)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, our ways are making these things move faster. If they wish to have the bells ring, we could cease asking questions. They need not rise and fill the space just because it is there. They could allow things to proceed to the next stage. Those options are available to them, but I am obliged to stand here and answer the questions as long as they keep coming for the time contemplated in the Standing Orders.

When we talk about budget bills, for example, as I said, we had the longest amount of time ever allocated to any budget implementation bill to its passage in Canadian history. One can hardly say that debate is any way constrained.

We want to see ample debate, but we want to see decisions get made. We want to see things come to a conclusion, but we are not shy of working extra hours to do it either. That is why the motion that we are dealing with here, government Motion No. 10, would see us prepared to sit until midnight every night in order to get results, to get more things done, and to deliver for our constituents back home on the very questions that they expect us to make decisions on for them.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today a little bit puzzled. We have a parliamentary democracy, and a parliamentary democracy has checks and balances built into it. Part of those checks and balances is the role of the opposition to debate legislation.

By the way, let me make it clear that I do not mind sitting until midnight. When it is midnight here, it is only 9 p.m. out on the west coast. I was raised in a household where, through many functions, we had to be up three or four nights and days in a row anyway, so that does not bother me at all.

What is beginning to bother me is how, time and time again, as a parliamentarian, I am having my voice silenced. What is so obnoxious about the motion before us right now is not the extended hours. I am hoping that we will have a House full across the way so that we can have a full debate. What I find obnoxious is the votes now being limited only to straight after QP. Maybe the government's side is worried that it cannot keep all of its MPs awake late at night. The other thing is that there are no dilatory motions from the opposition, only from the government.

Does my colleague across the way sincerely believe that parliamentary democracy works when the government uses bullying tactics like this and uses its majority to silence opposition and legitimate debate?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, if I understand the question correctly, the hon. member has no problem sitting late. She is quite happy to sit until midnight. She is happy to do that. She just objects to losing the ability to make two kinds of motions. That is what I think I just heard about dilatory motions. There are only two kinds of motions that she objects to, because that is what government Motion No. 10 is. Those motions are the motion to adjourn the House and to adjourn the debate.

From her question, I take it that she has absolutely no problem working late; she just objects to our taking away her ability to move to not work late.

This is the kind of stuff that we are accustomed to hearing from the opposition. It is nonsensical. It is ridiculous. If we are willing to work late, we are willing to say okay, we will not move to adjourn the House. We are willing to work late.

It is pretty simple.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like the government House leader to explain something. How can he be absolutely certain that the government is always right?

As I listen to debates here in the House I see that, on all sides of the House, there are competent members who represent their constituents honestly. I learn things from my colleagues and sometimes from other members as well. I learn all kinds of things. That is why we are paid to be here.

If we decide to put an end to the discussion, we will miss out on some important information that should be taken into account in making a decision. I think that the legislation to protect people from dangerous drugs is a very good idea. It is long overdue. We should have been able to suggest amendments in committee. However, I did not see a single amendment pass in committee. I think hell will freeze over and we may even get to skate with the devil before that happens.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member poses a very good question, which I think is the challenge for all of us: when do we think we know enough and when have we learned enough to be able to make a decision? This is always a challenge for us. It is a challenge in drafting the legislation and it is a challenge in our legislative process.

Of course most of the changes we make happen at committee, where it is done in substance, but it is indeed the effort to find that right balance that marks everything we do in making decisions. On the other hand, we do not want to cut short the opportunity for input in order to get it right and to hear all the different views, but we also do not want to leave ourselves paralyzed so that decisions cannot get made and things do not get done. We see the kind of political paralysis that has hurt some other countries economically in recent years, for example.

Our effort is to find that right balance. I think the hon. member has identified that issue exactly, and this is our effort. We believe we are finding that right balance. Hopefully we are able to do that in a fashion that lets us make decisions in an informed fashion, with everybody here having the best interests of the public in Canada at heart.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

● (1620)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

S. O. 57

(Division No. 145)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Crockatt
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
James	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Maguire
Mayes	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	O'Toole
Paradis	Payne
Poilievre	Raitt
Rajotte	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer– — 146

S. O. 57

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Bélanger	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brison	Brosseau
Caron	Cash
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Cleary
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathyssen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Nantel
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Péclet	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Trudeau	Turmel
Valeriote– — 113	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

The House resumed from May 26 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has seven minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think I will need to take the rest of that time. I wanted to conclude the earlier remarks I made with regard to Motion No. 10, which we are dealing with here. It is a motion through which the government has allowed itself to have extraordinary powers to use rules that all members usually have access to in the House. Now it will restrict them and limit them only to cabinet ministers.

Extending the hours of the House is fine. Allowing the Conservative cabinet members to be the only ones in the place to have these powers is not.

In earlier comments I was concerned for my Liberal colleagues, who seemed to think all of this was copacetic and good for Canada's democracy, and in fact seemed to be supporting the government on this motion to ram through more legislation and to abuse its majority powers. My Liberal friends need to come on board the democratic train here and at least stand up when Parliament is being bullied.

These are two separate issues for my friends across the way. They will catch up and pay attention to what we are doing now, which is dealing with Motion No. 10. What we just dealt with was another shutting down of Parliament. I believe it was the 64th time that debate has been shut down by the government. What we are dealing with now is Motion No. 10, to my Liberal colleagues across the way, which is a motion to extend the hours and limit control of the place only to Conservative cabinet members.

My Liberal friends and my Conservative friends know what is right. They know that democracy is more important than partisan antics, and I encourage them to fall back in line with some of the more true democratic principles.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for speaking to this important motion.

Here we have a situation where the government is trying to handcuff the opposition by saying that only ministers of the crown can propose any dilatory motions. The Liberals are supporting this, so they are supporting handcuffing the opposition.

How does the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley explain this?

● (1625)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I only encourage expediency through the questions and answers because, as the finance critic for the party, I am dealing with an omnibus bill at committee.

On my friend's question, I do not understand why the Liberals would support a motion that would handcuff all of Parliament except Conservative cabinet ministers. Just on principle alone, that seems like a very bad idea, considering some of the ethics and the behaviours of some Conservative cabinet ministers.

I would encourage my Liberal colleagues again, along with my Conservative colleagues in the backbenches who are also having their rights curtailed by this motion, to see the light, see something a bit better and support our opposition to this thing. Let us get Parliament doing what Parliament should do, which is to hold the government to account.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to put a question for my hon. colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I have to share with the rest of the House that last year when the motion was put forward for sitting until midnight, I did not see the problem. I am not immune to hard work. I work very hard. However, I was pretty much the only person who was here every night until midnight, and no aspersions on others in larger caucuses because I know people get different assignments.

One of the things I noted was the lack of utility in the whole exercise. We spent hours discussing bills on which everyone agreed, whereas there had been short shrift given to things like FATCA, on which both my hon. colleague and I want to run back to the finance committee to try to get a proper result there, an omnibus bill on which we know there was not adequate time for debate or study.

These are not small points. The security guards, the translators and the staff of this place go through weeks and weeks for something that is extremely gruelling and I fail to see a single benefit to democracy in this place, of mandatory sittings until midnight. We went through it last year and I did not see that it improved the quality of the work. By the end of the time, the Conservatives were pushing through bills that really were not urgent and on which, if they had done unanimous consent, they could have saved the House hours of debate, late hours for translators and late hours for security guards.

It certainly is offensive, as the hon. member has pointed out, to have the only motions that are allowed during these late sittings to be from members of the Conservative cabinet.

Does my hon. colleague have a single explanation, with much more experience in the House than I have, of what benefit anyone sees, other than a sort of game of chicken, "We'll work harder than they do. What are you trying to accomplish here? Are you ready to go for the summer?" It seems like an exercise in sadism more than anything else.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak to the sadistic tendencies of my Conservative colleagues across the way. I would only offer this.

That both, on the substance of this motion allowing Conservative cabinet ministers the exclusive rights and access to rules that guide this place, it is showing the dysfunction of Parliament under a Conservative government. Of course if there are bills and opportunities that the House unanimously agrees to, there are always opportunities for dialogue.

I know as former House leader that attempting dialogue with the Conservatives was like getting water from a stone sometimes. For my friend from the Green Party, what happens is that when the Conservatives only have one tool in the toolbox and it is a hammer, then everything starts to look like a nail, so they use the same tactics again and again.

As my friend from Saanich will know, when we have declared our willingness to support legislation we see as good and declare it our intention for the number of speakers we seek to have speak to the motion, the government shuts down debate anyway. Even when we tell the Conservatives yes on legislation that we all agree is for the benefit of the country, they return back to form and the Conservatives bring in more time allocation, more closure, and effectively shut down Parliament.

This is where we end up, with these ridiculous motions that take us to midnight, and the balance of things goes completely out of whack. Things that are deeply important, like FATCA, the agreement with the United States to disclose up to one million Canadians' tax information to the IRS, get minutes of discussion, yet we have prolonged hours on things that we agree to. That is all under the guidance of the Conservative House leader of the Conservative government.

It is a shame. It is what we have come to. We know we can do better. We will do better in 2015 when an NDP government actually allows this place to function and work on behalf of Canadians rather than be bullied on a day-to-day basis.

● (1630)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands made the comment, and I am not sure if I have the wording exactly right, "I don't know why we sit here late. I don't know why we do this. There's no one here. There's no one debating". I wonder if there is something to be said about that. There are often times we have this discussion in the media and whatnot about the efficacy of Parliament and why we do this and why we sit here.

Could my colleague comment, and I am trying to ask a non-partisan question here, about personal ownership as a member of Parliament to come to debate prepared, to understand the order paper, to understand our constituents' position and take that personal ownership to come and participate in debate?

As we wind down the session, we have a lot of opportunities to speak to some very important legislation. Certainly, these extended hours will provide opportunity to do that.

I take issue with the question or the supposition that there is not a point in having these late hours, as was presented earlier in a previous question. Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I am not entirely sure that was exactly what the leader of the Green Party was saying. She was decrying that the tactic and the hours that go into conversations she did not feel were worthwhile because there was too much agreement. We could disagree about that as to the effectiveness. Sometimes "getting on the record" is important to our constituents, even when there is broad agreement, but those opportunities are relatively rare.

I would suggest something further that contradicts the democratic values that I hope each party holds, which are things like the omnibus bill that we are dealing with in the sense of the complexity that goes into one piece of legislation and the opportunity to do, as my friend said, represent various views and differing views when there is one vote. The current omnibus bill has 60 different laws being amended at once. It is 350-something odd pages, and I am heading back to finance right now. It also has trade agreements, veterans issues and Supreme Court amendments. All of those things rammed into one bill is fundamentally anti-democratic.

It is not me who said that. It was the Prime Minister when he sat in opposition. He was the foreign affairs minister when he sat in opposition. He said that these tactics were counter to democratic principles, but now that the Conservatives have ended up in government expediency seems more important than it does to have those principles and ethics at hand. Unfortunately, to do as my friend has suggested, to represent the people we seek to represent in this place, becomes increasingly difficult or virtually impossible under a Conservative agenda. Everything is bullied through, everything is rammed through, dumped into omnibus bills, closure on debate, the watchdogs of democracy are attacked, such as the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the former auditor general, and the Supreme Court Justice of Canada.

Again and again we see the fundamental genetic tendency that is going on with the Conservative regime. It is obviously out of gas and has lost its way. Its principles are completely cast aside. It is unfortunate but it happens. Canadians will have an opportunity within a year or so to send a message back that they want their Parliament to work on behalf of Canadians, not on behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valleyfor really setting the tone for what is happening here, which is the government trying to run roughshod over democratic rights.

I know the member, who is now the finance critic, was the opposition House leader last year in June. My understanding is that most evenings it was the New Democrats who showed up to work and the New Democrats who spoke. Most nights there were very few others, maybe one Conservative and one Liberal speaking every couple of nights.

Could the member tell Canadians what the participation rate was last year when we went through this exercise of steamrolling by the government?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, what we know in attending the debates is that the Conservatives talk this tough line about working hard, that they are going to get to work and everybody else is the problem. Then when we look through the notes and the members who chose to participate, even on government bills that the Conservatives supported, the Conservatives do not show up. That is what they tended to do last year when this tactic was used quite early.

Historically speaking, as the House would know, extended hours are sometimes invoked, but much later in the session. They are by practice an attempt to clear the House of the last few stages of some bills that are hanging around. I think because the government has such a bad time getting its agenda accomplished, sometimes it is not even sure of its own agenda it seems, the randomness of bills, the sudden urgency of bills that suddenly come on the government's order, its practice has been counter to its narrative that it works hard. The practice and the reality is that it is overwhelming the number of NDP MPs who show up, do the hard work, the heavy lifting, and so be it. However, it seems strange that the Conservatives—

● (1635)

Hon. John Baird: You're the best.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, we are the best, as the foreign affairs minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Motion No. 10.

Part of the presentation that I was going to make was toward the end of my speech. However, based on the comment that was just made, I would like to bring it forward first. The comments were made by the critic for finance, the former opposition House leader, about how when we all agreed, we could not seem to get anything done.

I would like to use today as a perfect example of why we are doing this. Vanessa's law was being debated in the House. Every person in the House agrees with it, in all the speeches we have heard from the Liberals, from the official opposition and from our side. We wanted to bring it to a vote today. We wanted the debate to collapse so we could have the opportunity to vote on it after question period tomorrow, based on the rules we have.

What happened today is exactly the problem with this place. The New Democratic Party put up speaker after speaker saying the same thing. They all agreed that they were supportive of the bill. This bill is not at third reading. We are not yet making it law in the House and sending it to the Senate for it to review the bill and give it royal assent. This was just to send it to committee.

We have spent hours and hours on a bill that absolutely everyone in the House agrees with. The NDP members said that they were interested in going to committee because they may have some amendments, which is fair and we should have done that.

I was prepared, when the debate collapsed, to move that the vote would happen tomorrow. I sat ready to go in front of the Speaker at the time to make that happen, but there was speaker after speaker. Then they complain that we do not put enough people up. It is because we have said what we had to say on the Conservative side. We know where we stand and we want things to move along.

I checked my notes to see how far we had gone on government bills since we had taken office and since our last throne speech. We have passed, all the way through all stages and received royal assent on, nine bills. We are praising that we got nine through, but do members think the general public thinks that is a good use of our time and their taxpayer dollars, paying us to be here every day, saying the same thing over and over again? No.

There are items like Vanessa's law today that we could have passed quickly, got to committee and got back from committee. Even if there were amendments, we have report stage to deal with those. They come back for report stage. We deal with them. There is a debate and a discussion.

Let us face it. We call it debate, but it is mostly speeches and a short question and answer period after. That is really where there is some debate on our positions on the different issues.

Members cannot come to the House and claim that we are not doing enough and that we are delaying. In the same sentence, in the same presentation, those members complain about us using time allocation. They complain when we say that this is enough time on a particular item. Then they complain when we add more time for items to be discussed. They cannot have it both ways.

I know the New Democrats think they can have both ways. They think the taxpayer pays for everything and that everything is glorious. However, that is not the reality of the situation.

We have only passed nine bills into legislation. We have 18 government bills still on the order paper. We have 18 government bills that we want—

● (1640)

Mr. Peter Julian: Four of them were rejected by the Supreme Court. One you had to correct, and four of them—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The Chair agrees with the member for Burlington that there is a lot of noise in the chamber coming from both sides. I would ask all hon. members, including the member's colleagues, to listen carefully as he makes the balance of his presentation.

The hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time.

I want to speak about why it is important we do this. I have been here eight years. Every year we get a calendar printed in the fall that indicates with little stars the days we can have extended hours. Extended hours are not new. This year, I will admit, we are doing extended hours about a week prior to when it normally would have happened. It is a normal process, a normal way of doing business in this House that I have experienced eight times.

My understanding is it was the process prior to that. In fact, there were years in the past when extended hours took place in the evenings throughout the year, not just at the end of the session. However, things have changed and this is a normal way of proceeding so we can get some of the work done we need to do.

We have added approximately 20 hours of opportunity for debate per week. That is 20 hours, so 40 members of Parliament could make 20-minute speeches with 10 minutes of questions and comments. Often people split their time. Technically we could get as many as 40 people of the 308, or whatever there is, of us at this particular time. There are by-elections going. That would be 40 more opportunities to get up and say what the constituents we represent feel about a particular issue or about a particular bill.

We often get complaints that there is not enough time and that more members from whatever party in the opposition want to speak. This motion provides that opportunity for them to speak.

I would be the first to agree that likely at 11:30 p.m. there would not be a lot of people in the House. Some people would have said their piece and are not interested in talking about whatever issue is before the House, but there is opportunity for other members of Parliament to say their piece. That is what extended hours do. They provide opportunity for as many as 40 members a week. If we do it for three weeks, that is 120 more spots, so almost half the House would be able to speak in those extended hours.

That does not mean we are not meeting during the day, that we are still not opening at 10 and having debate all day long with a break for question period, routine proceedings, and private members' hour. All that opportunity is still there.

We are not limiting debate. We are increasing debate. It is important, in my view. We need to do this. When I go back to my constituency and tell the folks at the local riding association that we passed nine bills, people say to me, "That's it? What did you do the rest of the time?"

I did research on how many hours we spend on this. I think there is a better way of doing it more efficiently and effectively, and I may speak to that. We need to use our time efficiently and effectively to get changes made. Of the 18 bills that we have standing, a lot of them have not even got to committee yet, so all we need to do is move them on to committee.

Our committee right now is dealing with Bill C-13. We have had excellent panels come before us to talk about that bill. We have two more weeks of analyzing that bill, and I think it is an excellent demonstration of why it is important to get things out of the House. Each party has its say, a number of members put on the record their position and what they would like to see changed or why they support the bill, and then it goes to committee for a real discussion with debate. I think we should be doing that much faster, and maybe even providing more time for that at committee, but that does not work with the process we have here.

● (1645)

We are going to debate a private member's bill later tonight that talks about some changes in how we operate. It was brought forward by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills. There is some real opportunity for further change. Many of us spend hours and hours having staff members change our schedules because we have to get coverage for this and we are here and we have to give a speech at committee meetings, so we have to have someone cover us here. I do not know what it is like on the opposition benches, but I know what it is like on our side of the House.

There should be a review of how we operate here. Maybe we should have all our committee meetings in the morning with the House not sitting in the morning. Members would not be missing coverage or House duty because House duty would not start. Maybe we should do that. Maybe we should start debate on different items after question period. Maybe we should have all the votes after question period. I know this motion does that, but if we were a corporation we would not be operating this way. It is not efficient. It is not effective and it does not produce results as the smart people in the chamber could do.

My suggestion is that the House leaders from all sides look at why we need to bring the system of how we operate into the 20th century, maybe even the 21st century. It has been a traditional way of doing things. I think it is time to look at all those issues.

People will ask why we need to extend. As chair of the justice committee I will give one perfect example of why we need this time. The Minister of Justice introduced the victims bill of rights, a very important bill to the House. Tonight we will start debating that issue even further. In this case, there are many members of Parliament who would like to speak to the bill because it would make some fundamental changes to how we treat victims of crime in this country. It is appropriate that it is on the agenda for this evening and it gives us an opportunity for many more members to speak to it because we have extended the hours.

I would like to see the bill go to committee. It is still at second reading. I fully understand why so many members would like to speak to it. Extended hours provide that opportunity to do. Then I hope it will come to a vote before we rise for the summer. That would provide the justice committee with an opportunity to get ready over the summer for this very important bill, to make sure we invite the right number of witnesses. A relatively large list of people would like to come and talk on what could be improved, what they like about the bill. I do not know if people understand there are only nine weeks in the fall session between September until we leave at Christmastime. Nine weeks is not a lot of time. It does not provide much opportunity for members to speak to this fundamental bill.

We also will deal with Bill C-24 this week. Many members in the House would like to speak to strengthening the Citizenship Act. There are some fundamental changes in it. If we do not get it done and sent to committee before we leave, we basically will have to start over again in September. People now are engaged in the topic and understand what is going on. There is debate in the House and then the summer comes. Members go back and work in their ridings all summer and they have to get geared up again when they come back here.

● (1650)

I think it is important that we get that bill through, and there are a number of other bills. The opposition finance critic is at committee tonight dealing with the implementation bill, which is a significant bill. There is a lot of discussion about what is happening with that.

We need to be able to move forward, and there is nothing wrong with working late. I heard from the leader of the Green Party and the previous speaker. I do not think there is a lot of opposition to working late on these particular items because it does provide opportunity.

We have heard a little on who can bring forward certain motions, and the opposition is not happy about that. However, the whole concept of adding hours is to make the place a little more efficient and not bogged down with procedural motions, because that is what slows us down here.

There is a place for procedure. As chair of the justice committee, I understand that there needs to be procedure and it can move efficiently and effectively. Those rules are in place for a purpose, and I believe they have a role to play here, but we need to move forward.

There are nine bills, and to be frank about it, there are 18 bills still on the order paper from the government now. We have nine weeks in the fall and then we come to the last session before we break in 2015, and we know we will not be coming back before an election. We do not have a lot of time left from the government's perspective to get the legislation through the House, through the Senate, to royal assent, and into law. Once it becomes law, it then takes time to implement.

In Ontario, I talk to a grade 5 civics class and a grade 10 civics class. They ask how long it takes to get a law through. I am honest with them. I tell them that the reality is it takes at least a year. Some bills are a little faster than others, but in a normal process, from the start when a minister introduces it in the House to royal assent, it is approximately a year. Then, it depends on what kind of law it is, but let us say it is on the Criminal Code, it takes a while for it to get implemented. Also, there are often regulations in other areas that have to be added before it actually comes into force. It is a slow process to begin with.

With the process we have here, in my view, as a city councillor who advocated for the council to go from 17 to 7 for improved efficiency and effectiveness of the councillors, I think we can do a much better job here in the House of Commons for efficiency and effectiveness. We need to look at that in the future, but in the meantime, extended hours help us get our legislation through this House.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member's speech and frankly, I am astonished. This is about being for or against democracy. If he could, would he go straight to the checkout without buying groceries, so to speak?

The party opposite would like to pass the bills in a hurry. I, for example, have had no opportunity to speak to Bill C-17, Vanessa's law, so how are the people in my constituency supposed to know that the bill exists? They will know if I can speak to it and that finds its way into social media and the press. If not, they will never know what is in the bill, unless the hon. member comes to my region to talk about it. This is a way in which one can express oneself.

Can the hon. member tell me where the blame lies in all this? In the fall, we began this session of Parliament late. How many weeks have we lost? How many times has the government prorogued Parliament? If the government had not wasted time and limited members' speaking time, perhaps we would not be in this situation today.

Perhaps the hon. member is running out of steam. Perhaps he is getting fed up with being a member of Parliament. Perhaps he would like to do something else in life. Perhaps he prefers the open road to open debate as a way of giving people information. However, we feel that it is important to fulfill that role here.

● (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I am a little confused by the question, in the sense that we are actually adding time. We are adding speaking slots, so our New Democratic friends and other members of the House will have an opportunity to speak to things.

We are not limiting; we are adding speaking opportunities. We are adding 20 hours a week. With the 20-minute slots with 10 minutes for questions and answers, that is 20 people. If they split their time, that is 40 people.

Through this motion, we are actually giving the member from the New Democratic Party even more opportunities to get a speaking slot, to be able to go on the record with the member's position on whatever particular bill is being debated at that time.

The member criticizes the motion in that it limits debate, but in actual fact it is extending debate. That is what "extended hours of debate" means.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting, when the member tries to come across as being this great saviour of democratic debate inside the chamber, that the reality could not be further from the truth.

When we look at important pieces of legislation that the government has brought in, where there has been a great need for debate, the government uses time allocation as a part of the normal process, more so than any other government in the history of Canada. The government limits the amount of debate on any given bill.

In one sense, I feel a little bit of the frustration that the government members will have at times, and earlier today might have been one of those examples, in terms of Vanessa's law. Everyone seems to be supporting it. One would think it would be passing relatively quickly.

What this tells me is that the government does not have the ability to work with the opposition in particular, or the official opposition has no good will in terms of working with the government to try to have a legislative agenda where time allocation is not necessary.

We are not having appropriate debate on important pieces of legislation. My question for the member is this. At the very least, will he acknowledge that using time allocation on some of the more important pieces of legislation does limit debate inside the House?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I spoke to time allocation a number of weeks ago. I completely disagree with the member opposite from the Liberal Party.

Time allocation, even by definition, sets aside the amount of time. It does not limit debate. If we look at the number of hours, the number of speaking slots that have been provided through time allocation at second reading before bills go to committee and at third reading, we would find that there are hours and hours of discussion.

I would then challenge the members to look at the blues, to look at the transcripts of what is actually said. I think members would find that in many cases there is a repetitive message, over and over again, which is fair.

However, how many times do we have to hear the same thing before we move on and say, okay, we agree to disagree; or we agree, we understand the message, we understand the position? We do not need to hear it 308 times.

If we gave every single person in this place a speaking slot on every issue, we would get one bill done every four years. That would not be a good use of government time.

● (1700)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that, far too often in this place, we sit around debating bills with which everyone agrees. We spend an inordinate amount of time supporting bills where there is agreement, almost a consensus.

The reluctance on the opposition's part to allow things to come a vote after a reasonable period of time is what is fueling these types of motion.

I, for one, would like less debate on some bills where there is broad agreement and perhaps more debate on substantial bills. However what we see far too often is that the opposition and the government only have themselves to blame.

In the Ontario Legislature when I was the opposition House leader, we had an agreement that we would debate certain bills longer than others and actually require that there be votes at the end of that. That is what they do in Manitoba, I hear. We did this in 2003-04, and it actually worked.

What we have now is that some opposition members want a full debate on absolutely everything, regardless of how contentious it is, regardless of how substantial it is, and then we do not have enough time for longer debate on those things that are consequential.

This requires a bit of co-operation, and regrettably we have not seen that.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his question and the work he is doing as foreign affairs minister. He is doing a fantastic job.

The point the minister is making happened today, and I want to use today as the example. In my speech, I talked about Vanessa's law. During the question and answer period, even my friends in the Liberal Party asked the New Democratic speakers why they were not letting this go to a vote. They asked, if the New Democrats were supporting it going to committee, why were they not voting on it. They debated it until question period, and that stopped debate. We could have had that done hours before question period.

The next bill to be called was going to be Bill C-32, the victims bill of rights act, one that requires, in my view, a lot of discussion in the House, because we would be making a fundamentally different change in the Criminal Code and in the protection of victims in the criminal justice system. It requires a lot of discussion, and I believe there are a lot of members of Parliament who would like to speak to different parts of that bill. It is a significant bill and deserves that kind of attention, but no, we spent hours and hours on the bill for Vanessa's law, which is very important but agreed to by all sides. That is what is wrong with the system. That is why we are forced to have extended hours: to give members an opportunity to debate.

If we did things more efficiently and effectively around here, we would not need the types of motion we are seeing in front of us today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what an odd debate. I listened with interest to the speech by the hon. member for Burlington. He is the chair of the committee and I am the vice-chair.

I found some of his statements peculiar. The fundamental problem with the motion presently before the House is not the fact of staying until midnight. The NDP team has a reputation for hard work. Anyone who wants to entertain themselves by visiting my Facebook page would see that the people of Gatineau are actually advising me to slow down because they are worried about my health. Perhaps they are right, considering the flu I have at the moment. We in the NDP work very hard. A number of bills, for example, are before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, so that they can be debated in the House or in committee. It is not the work we are afraid of.

The cat is out of the bag. There are issues that our Conservative friends want to talk about, and they want to speak about them at length. Had I been asked, I would have said—before they even rose to speak—that I expected to see a great many Conservatives rise to speak in the House about Bill C-32. Why? Because it is an opportunity for the Conservatives to give Canadians the impression that they have been dealing with this issue—and this issue alone—for weeks, months and even years. They are the ones who stand up for victims. We are all deadbeats and have washed our hands of the problem. That is not true, though. Now, when workers' rights were at stake, the Conservatives wanted to cut debate short.

The member said that nine bills had been passed and that he is embarrassed to return to Burlington. What I would say to him is that he is absolutely right to be embarrassed; the Conservatives did nothing with their majority aside from getting nine bills passed, and they had to resort to time allocation motions to ram the bills through. There is something not quite right with this government. The Conservatives are averse to debate. They do not like hearing opinions that do not coincide with their own. When the Conservatives too often hear something they disagree with, a red light suddenly goes on. We have had to debate many a time allocation motion. I do not know how many times I have taken part in debates in the House or how many speeches I have made expressing my dissatisfaction with the fact that we have been stripped of our right to speak.

The Conservatives made mention of Bill C-13. I am fortunate to be the NDP justice critic and to have had the opportunity to voice my opinion regarding this omnibus bill, right after the minister spoke. This is no small bill; on the contrary, it is approximately 50 pages long and has an impact on numerous other pieces of legislation. It does address the issue of cyberbullying, as the government likes to point out, but it goes much farther, so far that the committee is being flooded with requests for meetings. We hear all manner of experts warning us to be careful. That is what is missing in the House.

The Senate is referred to as a chamber of sober second thought, but we were not elected to this place in order to abdicate our duty to think. Members have a responsibility to be present in the House to voice and stand up for the opinions of their constituents. Canadians expect us to go about our work in an intelligent and thoughtful manner, to take the time to properly analyze bills. I am in favour of debating this bill in the House and referring it to committee for further consideration. More often than not, bills are analyzed at lightening speed.

The Conservatives will say that the House was given an opportunity to debate Bill C-13, the bill on cyberbullying, and thank God, especially given the time allocation motion that was foisted upon us so as to ram the bill through to committee.

● (1705)

Suddenly, things became urgent. Why urgent after the death of Rehtaeh Parsons, and yet not after the death of Amanda Todd? That was a question a witness asked us. The notion that the government would somehow need to act urgently does not really cut it with me; these things are more politically driven than they are concrete. It is a bit worrisome.

Bill C-13 is large and contains a number of disturbing provisions. When considered alongside the remarks made by the Conservative committee members, it leads me to believe that the Conservatives will not be very receptive to the many amendments proposed by expert witnesses. If past events are any indication, I am not very optimistic. Still, I am an optimistic woman by nature.

In light of this, I have trouble believing it when the government tells us, hand on heart, that its goal is to work harder. Working harder, for a Conservative, does not necessarily mean working more effectively and harder. It simply means that members end up working until midnight in order to discuss all the bills before the House, including those bills that have not been studied for an eternity.

For example, there is Bill C-2 on safe injection sites; Bill C-3 on marine transportation; Bill C-6, which implements the Convention on Cluster Munitions; Bill C-8 on counterfeit products; and Bill C-10 on contraband tobacco, which we finished studying in committee such a long time ago that I will have to reread all my material. Indeed, since then, we have studied so many other topics that I have almost had enough time to forget all about it. We will resume studying this bill at report stage. We could have covered it a long time ago. I have been waiting for some time for this stage to be completed in the House. Everything will have to be done over. It is a colossal waste of time for everyone concerned. There is also Bill C-11 on the hiring of injured veterans. If there is a category of people in our society who have huge needs, it certainly is our veterans.

Suddenly, the Conservatives are going to try and push all this through at once. The member for Burlington has done the math when it comes to the number of hours, and the government is going to try and give us a few hours for each bill. Then the government turns around and calls itself a champion of hard work. Well done, champion.

There is also Bill C-17, Vanessa's law, about drug safety, an extremely important bill that must be debated; Bill C-18, concerning farm regulations; and Bill C-20, concerning the Canada-Honduras agreement, which is at report stage. I no longer even remember when I gave my last speech on that subject. It has already been a heck of a long time. The Conservatives have been in no rush, but all of a sudden, they are in a rush.

We will examine Bill C-21, concerning red tape for small businesses. The junior Minister of Tourism is travelling all over Canada to talk about the importance of eliminating red tape everywhere, while this bill is stuck in some office or other. It could have been debated a long time ago.

There is Bill C-22, concerning oil, gas and nuclear liability, and Bill C-24, concerning the Citizenship Act. These are bills that are announced to us with great fanfare at big press conferences, but then they stagnate and we do not see them again.

There is Bill C-26, about sexual predators. I expected that one would move quickly, because the Conservatives told us we had to work on this issue quickly. There is also Bill C-27, about hiring veterans in the public service. It is extremely important, I repeat, because it concerns a category of people in our society who have needs that are just as important.

Then there is Bill C-32, about the victims bill of rights. I think it is the reason why this government's Motion No. 10 has no credibility at all. For a full year, I was treated to one press conference after another. If it was not the Prime Minister, it was the Minister of Justice with his senator from the other side. They told us they were going to work very hard, listen, set up panels and do everything we could wish for, and then they brought forth a charter that was denounced by many people, starting with victims, because they expected a lot more. That may be why the Conservatives kept their charter hidden for some time.

● (1710)

Apart from the minister, one Liberal and myself, no one has yet spoken on this subject. I am going to make a wager with my colleagues in the House. I expect there will be a time allocation motion on this. The Conservatives are going to rend their garments and plead that it is urgent, that it is extremely important and that it must be passed immediately, or the opposite will happen, because they will want to talk to us about it for hours on end. It becomes part of their narrative.

Every Conservative member wants to go back to their riding and have their householder and the excerpt from their speech in the House, which they made to show that they are protecting victims' rights.

In the NDP, we want to talk about important issues and show that we could do even better than Bill C-32, specifically by amending it. We want to talk about the proposals made by the federal ombudsman for victims of crime. In fact, Bill C-32 does not contain a large percentage of her recommendations. A balance has to be struck. For every Conservative who speaks, the New Democrats will also speak.

When we want to talk about something, it is not important. That is the message we constantly get in the House, and, perhaps because we are approaching the end of the session, it is becoming extremely annoying, to put it mildly and stay within the bounds of parliamentary language.

It is appalling to see that people who are elected to represent the residents of their riding are silenced as often as we are by this government. We get told they are not interested. I have also heard the member for Burlington say—and I am going to talk to him about it again, in fact, at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights—that sometimes we just need to go and read because members all read pretty much the same thing.

If the people of Gatineau think the same thing as the people of Laval, I think it is important that this be pointed out. Who has more right than whom to speak in the House on a particular bill? There is something indecent about wanting to constantly silence people.

Sometimes, I tell the members opposite that they should stop imposing time allocation motions and motions to get things done, as they like to say. I very much liked the expression my colleague used yesterday, when he talked about motions that are "a licence for laziness".

This is unpleasant. If they had taken the time spent on debating those motions and instead used the time to finish the debate on the bill that they were trying to stop from being debated, we would probably have finished. The fact is that not all members in the NDP caucus or the Liberal Party or the Green Party or whatever colour you like necessarily wish to speak.

However, if the government limits the speaking time of a single member who wishes to speak, we cannot claim to be living in a democratic system. That is what is known as the tyranny of the majority. I believe we have to stand up against that, loud and clear. Every time that happens here, we are going to speak out against it, in every way possible.

We are told that we could perhaps go faster. I listened to the Minister of Foreign Affairs say that, and what he said made sense, in some respects. The way that Manitoba and the NDP government operate makes sense. Those consensus-based approaches make sense.

Quebec managed to pass a bill on a very sensitive issue, end-of-life care, with the agreement of all parties. There was an election, and the members all agreed to reinstate the bill once the election was over. That is being discussed.

The problem here is that the people on the Conservative benches are not talking to the opposition parties. All they talk about is strategies. We keep wondering who is going to pull a fast one on us. They use roundabout tactics such as counting how many MPs are in the House, catching them off guard, and forcing a party leader to go testify before a committee. This is unprecedented—and they say they are democratic.

● (1715)

Then the Conservatives get all offended when we say that Motion No. 10 is total nonsense. This is not about giving us more time. This is about taking all of the bills—there are more on the agenda than have already been passed, and that took much longer than the amount of time we have between now and June 20—and making us think they are giving us more time. They are not giving us a thing. I do not believe in Conservative gifts, and nobody in Canada should believe in any Conservative gift whatsoever.

The truth is that the Conservatives are going to shove their agenda down our throats because they could not get through it in a mature, parliamentary, by-the-rules way. They could have said that the House leaders would discuss it and try to see if some of the bills were more palatable or if we could agree to pass some of them more quickly. Then the real committee work could have started.

It is true, for Bill C-13, we had a lot of witnesses. However, I am not yet ready to give a seal of approval to the government in power, indicating that the bill has been studied in depth, because we still have the entire amendment stage. I believe that what the other side wants to accept is under so much remote control that the committee is not really doing the work. Instead, the higher-ups are dictating to our colleagues opposite what they have to do, while at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, we are trying to bring out the best in the bill.

I have not even mentioned the upcoming Bill C-35, dealing with service animals. Bill S-2 deals with statutory instruments and may not seem like much. However, it is a very significant bill that is going to change an entire way of doing things in terms of regulations. We know that regulations have an impact on the everyday lives of our fellow Canadians in all kinds of areas: the environment, transportation, health and what have you. This is a real concern. I bet that we will analyze it very quickly. That concerns me.

The fact that we are extending our hours until midnight does not encourage any belief on my part that we will be having constructive debates followed by more productive work in committee. That is why the Conservatives have this problem with credibility. We are not the only ones saying so. When their measures are challenged in court, the Conservatives get slammed.

I will take a deep breath and take a little time to say that perhaps we should review our way of doing things. Our friends in the House may not know this, but the bill on prostitution may well be coming our way next week. We hear whispering in the corridors that the government wants the bill passed. It is huge, though, since it comes as a response to a Supreme Court of Canada decision. Everyone in the House knows that passing the bill will not be easy because there are people on all sides of that issue. I would bet that we are going to have just a few hours of debate before they pitch it—to put it very nicely—to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. We can expect a hot and heavy summer on that one.

Extending the sitting hours until midnight just to work harder is one more tactic that is just like their time allocation motions, closure motions and any other kind of motion they can think of. It is part of the Conservatives' bag of undemocratic tricks. They will force these tricks on the House, but not on themselves, as ministers. Based on how the motion is written, I think it will be quite humourous. It will be interesting to see how many of them will be here in the House to happily participate in the debates on all the topics I mentioned, instead of at a cocktail party. That is why it is extremely important that we amend this motion.

Seconded by the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "place" and substituting the following:

(b) when a recorded division is demanded in respect of a debatable motion, including any division arising as a consequence of the application of Standing Order 61(2), but not including any division in relation to the Business of Supply, Private Members' Business, or arising as a consequence of an order made pursuant to Standing Order 57,

(i) before 5:30 p.m. on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, it shall stand deferred until the time immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business at that day's sitting,

(ii) after 5:30 p.m. on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, it shall stand deferred until the time immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business at the next day's sitting,

(iii) after 5:30 p.m. on a Thursday, or at any time on a Friday, it shall stand deferred until 6:30 p.m. on the following Monday.

● (1720)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The amendment is in order.

● (1725)

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her speech. I have had the opportunity to serve on various committees with her. I find her to be very good to work with, very genial, something I think most Canadians would be happy to see in their parliamentarians.

That said, I found her speech, despite her mention that she is mainly an optimist, to be very much negative in tone. She is not taking into account that there are many things in the motion that would actually benefit the majority of members in the House.

For example, in time allocation we have a schedule that ultimately allocates how much time we have for debate. When we rise for the summer, there is going to be no opportunity for that to happen. What this particular motion does, and I hope the member can acknowledge it, is give more opportunity to speak to constituents, more opportunity to be in the House here to debate, and more opportunity to make committee meetings. If we have meetings with constituents and meetings with committees, we are not able to be here to engage. This motion would allow us up until that time—it is only an extra week—the opportunity for more of us to be empowered and to ask more questions of the government and of the opposition so that we end up with better debate.

Does she not see the positive elements in this motion that allow each individual member that empowerment?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I wish so much that I could agree. However, right now I do not see even with five minutes more getting more answers from the government. We get zero answers from the government. We get skating around.

My point, which I think he missed completely, is that it will not give us more time. The Conservatives will just take a big piece of legislation and try to slam it down our throats in the period they will have added, but under the fake disguise that they worked so hard. On May 27 they have exactly nine pieces of legislation adopted since October of 2013. Now they will go back to their ridings saying they had 19 plus 9, so 28, pieces of legislation adopted in that period of time from October to June. They will not say to the public it was all done in the month of June. If they think that is adopting something after serious consideration, I do not.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague on her speech. She very eloquently illustrated the government's lack of professionalism. She showed how adding extra sitting hours does not mean working more effectively. It means botching bills the way the government keeps doing. Then we have to fix the government's mistakes later.

I would like my colleague to elaborate on the government's dysfunctional nature and its inability to work effectively in the House.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I will give a few very interesting examples. I talked about Bill C-32 earlier. The last time we studied it was on April 9. Three people spoke to this bill, which the government claims is fundamental and extremely important.

I cannot wait to see which of these bills will get more time than the others. Obviously it will be their pet projects, the ones they can get a lot of mileage out of.

There are other bills that we have not seen since January, such as Bill C-2. Three people spoke to Bill C-3 on May 8. No one has spoken to Bill C-6 yet. Three people spoke to Bill C-8 and no one has spoken to Bill C-10. However, they were approved in committee a very long time ago.

If the government believed in the fight against contraband tobacco, the bill would have been sent back to the House as soon as it left the committee. Since the bill was approved in committee, it could have been passed quickly by the House. We are going to have to pass it at the same time as a bunch of other bills.

● (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Gatineau will have five minutes remaining for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

[*For continuation of proceedings see part B*]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

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(Part B)

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1730)

[*English*]

REFORM ACT, 2014

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC) moved that Bill C-586, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act (candidacy and caucus reforms), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I, like many of my colleagues in the House, have spent countless hours in this place over the years. We have spent countless years debating and arguing and trying to convince our colleagues of our position on various issues. Like my colleagues in the House, I have participated in numerous debates, sat for hundreds of hours on parliamentary committees, and sat late into the evening, as we will once again tonight, on debate. I have run in five general elections, standing up for the principles and ideals that I believe in and for my constituents in Wellington—Halton Hills.

I say all this because the House of Commons is really like a second home to all of us because of the amount of time we spend here. My colleagues are like family, and like all families we have our agreements and our disagreements and we have our ups and downs. Like family, we are honest with each other. If we are honest, we will acknowledge that we have a problem in Canada's Parliament.

The Senate scandals and last year's controversy in the House about whether or not MPs have the right to stand and speak make it clear that decades of changes to Parliament and our electoral laws have weakened the role of elected legislators and centralized that power in party leaders. It is clear that Parliament needs to be reformed.

Barrels of ink have been spent documenting this problem throughout the decades. Countless books, academic papers, columns, and journals have been written.

The problems in Parliament today are not the result of any one party or any one leader. They are not the result of any one set of actors. They are the result of changes that have happened through successive Parliaments, through governments and leaders of different stripes from different parties.

Party leaders themselves have acknowledged this problem. Party leaders from John Turner to Preston Manning, from Paul Martin to current party leaders, have called for measures to address this "democratic deficit".

Despite all the barrels of ink, despite all the platform commitments, despite all the attempts to change, little if anything has happened. Arguably the problem is worse today than it ever has been, so today, in this month, in this year, the time has come to act, and act we must, because it is clear that Canadians are becoming increasingly disillusioned with their Parliament and their democracy.

Parliamentary reform includes both the House of Commons and the Senate, but before we reform the Senate, we must reform the House of Commons. The reason is very simple: in our Parliament there is only one place where the people have a democratically elected voice, where people are democratically elected on the basis of population, where people have an appeal to the powers that govern this country, and that is the House of Commons, not the Senate of Canada.

Furthermore, it is clear in the recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling that Senate reform, whether it is in the form of abolition or whether it is in the form of term limits and direct election of senators, will require a constitutional amendment and the consent of provincial governments and provincial legislatures.

The bill in front of us today addresses reform in what I believe to be the more important chamber in this Parliament; not only that, it is achievable through a simple piece of legislation.

I have spent a quarter of my life in this institution, and I believe there are three reasons for the problems we face today.

First, party leaders approve party candidates. In fact, to my knowledge, Canada is the only western democracy where, by law, party leaders have the power to approve party candidates in an election. To my knowledge, no other western democracy has given party leaders this enormous power over their party candidates.

Second, the unwritten conventions that have governed parliamentary party caucuses have changed over the decades, and they have changed and evolved in a way that has advantaged the caucus leadership and disadvantaged caucus members.

Third, the role of the caucus in reviewing the leader has been little used and the rules are opaque. This has weakened the accountability of party leaders to their respective caucuses in a system of parliamentary democracy wherein caucuses once elected the party leader.

● (1735)

As a result, Canadians are losing confidence in the ability of their elected MPs to represent them in Ottawa and increasingly feel that MPs represent Ottawa to them. Voter turnout has declined and many feel disconnected from politics and political parties. In the last federal election, four out of 10 Canadians did not vote. According to Samara, a democracy think tank, 50 years ago, nearly 80% of Canadians voted in federal elections. Today voter turnout is closer to 60%, and the most dramatic declines have taken place in the last 25 years. According to Nik Nanos, the pollster, just over 60% of eligible voters cast their ballots in the last federal election, and among those under 30 years of age, fewer than 40% bothered to vote.

Before we suggest that this problem is endemic in all western democracies, if we look at data from Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom, voter turnout in their recent federal elections was 93% in Australia, 74% in New Zealand, 67% in the United States, and 66% in the United Kingdom. Canada is the outlier in voter participation in national elections. This data comes from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

I want to emphasize why the role of elected MPs is so important. In many democracies, such as the great democracy to the south of us, voters and citizens have three franchises. They have three votes at the national level. They vote for the head of government, the president; they vote for a member of their upper chamber, a senator; and they vote for a member of their lower chamber, a congressman or congresswoman. The same is true in France, where citizens vote for a president, a member of their lower chamber, and indirectly, for members of their upper chamber.

In those democracies and many others, citizens have three avenues to pursue when they want their democratic voice effected, when they want their representation heard. However, in Canada and most Westminster parliamentary democracies, voters have one vote, one franchise, at the federal level, and that is a vote for their local member of Parliament. That is why the role of that local elected member of Parliament in the Canadian system is so incredibly important.

Many colleagues have questioned why we should use legislation as a means to implement this. They have pointed to other Westminster parliamentary democracies and have suggested that in those Westminster systems, the rules have not been effected through legislation, and they are correct. I would say two things in response to that argument. Legislation is important for two reasons. First, it is important to apply these changes to all parties so that no one party can game the system to its advantage, so that the rules are consistent for all parties. Second, for over 20 years, we have been talking about reforms that will address the democratic deficit, and to this point, little, if anything, has happened. Legislation is a clear and transparent way to implement the changes necessary.

I want to make a point on the need to write the rules down. If we look at other Westminster parliamentary democracies, they have all written the rules down about either the review or the election of the party leader and the role caucuses play in the review or the election of the party leader. The U.K. conservative caucus has written down rules in a document called, “The Fresh Future”. It is filed with the library of Parliament in the United Kingdom.

The U.K. Labour Party has a document that details the rules for the election of the party leader and the participation of caucus in that election. The New Zealand Labour Party has rules that clearly outline the role of caucus in reviewing and electing the party leader. The New Zealand National Party has rules that clearly outline the role of the caucus in the review and election of the party leader.

The Australian Liberal Party has clear rules on the review and the election of the party leader, as does the Labor Party. It has clear, written-down rules about the review and election of the party leader. I say all this because we are the last holdout among Westminster parliamentary democracies in writing down the rules on the role caucus should play in either the review of the leader or the election of the interim leader, and that is why this legislation is necessary.

● (1740)

Transitions in power, whether they be in opposition or government caucuses, are vitally important in a democracy. It is the hallmark of a democracy. Clear rules-based systems for transfers of power are especially important for the caucus that is in power.

Now, some have suggested that by restoring local control over party candidates, as this bill would do, we would get problem candidates. Well, we already do. We can all think of the instance in the Conservative Party when we had an embarrassing situation in 2006, when a candidate smuggled 112 bottles of booze across the U.S.-Canada border. We can all think of the New Democratic candidate who videotaped himself smoking marijuana in the Vancouver Lower Mainland and gave Mr. Layton a great deal of indigestion when he uploaded the video to YouTube. We can all think of the white supremacist who ran as a Liberal Party candidate in the last election.

Every party has candidates who cause embarrassment for the party. It happens today and no doubt it will happen under local control. Furthermore, by restoring local control, there is nothing to prevent the local officials from deciding that a party candidate needs to be removed as a party candidate.

Finally, before 1970, the parliaments of Canada were not characterized as full of crazy and extreme candidates. Those parliaments were populated by Canadians who did the hard work of governing this country. Therefore, the need for the party leader veto simply is not there and needs to be removed.

We have a double check in our system. First, we must ask local party members to select the party candidate in an electoral district, and then the voters in that electoral district have to decide if that party candidate should be their member of Parliament. If both groups of Canadians, local party members and the voters in that riding, decide that a particular candidate should be their member of Parliament, we should respect their choice and respect their vote.

Review of the rules for the interim leader and for the election of the interim leader are vitally important. What would happen if, God forbid, the head of a G7 government were to suddenly become incapacitated or die while in office? What exactly are the rules and the role caucus plays in electing a new interim leader who would also become, based on the appointment by the Governor General, the full prime minister of this country, with all the powers vested in that office? These rules need to be a lot clearer, and they need to be written down.

There is a lot more I could say about the importance of this legislation and why I think members in the House should support it, but I will finish on this thought.

Democracies around the world are the most prosperous, most stable, and most productive societies, and that is no accident. This economic prosperity, productivity, and stability derives directly from the democratic foundations of these societies.

In Canada, it is the health of our democratic institutions that is going to determine the economic prosperity our children and grandchildren will enjoy in these years of the 21st century. In the long run, democratic checks and balances on power are the most important way to ensure long-run outcomes that ensure prosperity and stability.

It is clear that Canadians want us to reform Parliament. We must reform Parliament, or the reform will be forced upon us by Canadians themselves, so let us not be timid about the changes proposed in this piece of legislation. Let us be bold. Let us send it to committee for further study and amendment.

If we are asking Canadians to once again trust us as politicians, if we are asking Canadians to once again trust their elected officials, the House of Commons, and the Senate, the Parliament of Canada, to govern this body politic, we as politicians and members of this House must trust Canadians. We must trust Canadians with the vote, whether they be local party members electing a local party candidate, Canadians electing their member of Parliament to make decisions on their behalf, or Canadians in this House of Commons exercising their judgment as to whether a colleague should sit inside or outside of caucus or whether a party leader should be reviewed and an interim leader elected.

We have to trust. That is the foundation of this bill. I ask members of this House to support this bill at second reading and send it to committee for further study and debate.

● (1745)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to quickly ask a question that has to do with one provision in the bill, which would accord the electoral district associations the power to set the timing and the rules for nomination contests.

There is some concern on my side of the House, a concern that I share, that without more specification, the question of the application of national rules designed to promote diversity in the recruitment and representation of candidates in elections might be affected.

I would like my hon. colleague, if he could, to speak to this and whether he would be willing to work with us to make sure that this particular concern was addressed.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would be willing to work with the member and any other colleagues who have concerns about this particular clause through the work of the committee.

However, I would also answer the question by telling the member that the bill maintains the current power of the party leader and two other officers of a registered political party to unilaterally deregister and re-register an electoral district association. By maintaining that current power in the Canada Elections Act, we would ensure that parties could mandate a consistent set of rules across all 338 electoral districts and ensure the kind of policies the NDP currently has in place.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his efforts to improve our democracy.

[*English*]

I just want to ask him if he is aware that in one of the cases he mentioned, the Labor Party of Australia, after they twice removed the prime minister the people had chosen because they thought it was maybe one of the reasons they had a terrible defeat last time, they decided last July to remove the ability of the caucus to dismiss its leader if the leader was the prime minister. The irony of the case he mentioned is that they freely decided, as a party, to have rules more like the current rules in Canada.

Does he realize that they have been able to do so because there is no straitjacket law imposed on parties, something his bill would do, and that we would be the only democracy to do so? The majority today would decide the internal democratic rules of all parties in Canada.

Does he not think it is a dangerous precedent that exists in no other democracy in the world, and certainly not in Australia?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

I think it is very important to have written rules. The greatest danger right now is that the current rules that allow caucuses to assess their leaders are not written down. In a democracy that believes in a system of laws, it is important to have written rules.

● (1750)

[*English*]

It is important to have written rules, because unwritten rules and conventions are subject to ad hoc and arbitrary measures. That is far more dangerous than using the medium of legislation to ensure consistent written rules for all parties in this chamber.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share a similar concern with the previous questioner. I listened to the hon. member's response. He said that he felt there needed to be written rules rather than conventions. My concern is that what we are doing here is having Parliament set the rules for political parties and the way they run their nomination processes and their caucuses. My feeling would be that this should be something political parties determine on their own. It is something caucuses should determine.

If the member wants written rules, why did he not choose to approach his political party and encourage other political parties and caucuses to do the same, rather than prescribe something by Parliament?

As a supplementary question, who would he see enforcing these rules? Would it be Elections Canada, Parliament, or an officer of Parliament? What would be the prescription?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, the rules would be enforced by the members themselves, just as we self-enforce the rules on the Standing Orders and other unwritten conventions that govern parliamentary parties in this place.

To respond to the first part of his question, political parties are quasi-public institutions. The days that this chamber and political parties existed as private clubs for an elite group of people are over. Parties in this country are registered under law. They are creations of the Canada Elections Act for a reason, because they receive hundreds of millions of dollars a decade of political public taxpayer dollars. In return for the receipt of that public money, they ought to be publicly accountable and publicly available to a broad group of Canadians.

In the last ten years, the Conservative Party of Canada has received close to $300 million in public support through political tax credits and other political expenditures, which the Department of Finance Canada considers expenditures, and other forms of subsidies. In return for that money, we are quasi-public institutions, and we ought to be publicly accountable for that money.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me, on this debate on Bill C-586, I would like to begin with a very short quotation:

> Canadian party leaders today enjoy a remarkable amount of power when measured against their peers in Canadian history, or against leaders in similar parliamentary systems around the world.

That is taken from a remarkable new book that I think many in the House are beginning to read, by Alison Loat and Michael MacMillan, *Tragedy in the Commons: Former Members of Parliament Speak Out About Canada's Failing Democracy.*

It is important to note that, in addition to party leaders, party leaders as prime ministers have a particular power in Canada. A 2007 study quoted in the book I just cited, by Irish political scientist Eoin O'Malley, compared 22 parliamentary democracies and found that the Canadian prime minister ranked as the most powerful of all 22.

Not only party leaders but prime ministers in our particular version of the Westminster system have a great deal of power. It is for that reason that I thank the member for bringing the bill forward, for daring to bring the bill forward and spark the kind of debate that is necessary for us to ask whether or not the particular degree of power of both party leaders and prime ministers needs to be looked at in order to make our democracy healthier.

I would also like to quickly summarize what I understand to be in the bill, so we can be clearer when I speak to one or two other elements in terms of how much I support or have concerns.

First of all, I would say the bill would do three things. In the first area, it would decentralize the nomination process of party candidates in two key ways. The first is that local registered associations—let us call them EDAs—would determine the timing of and the governing rules for nomination contests. That relates to the question I just asked the hon. member. The second thing is that, within this decentralization of the nomination process, the party leader would be removed by the bill from the process of endorsing party candidates under the Canada Elections Act and replaced by province-wide nomination officers who are given that role.

The second thing the bill would do is in the realm of caucus governance and discipline, and there are two key elements. One is that there would now be mandatory election rules for caucus chairs to be elected and rules around how that would happen. That is already done in the New Democratic Party. I understand it is not the case in the Conservative Party. This would make it mandatory for all. The second thing within the caucus governance and discipline theme is that the caucus would explicitly have control over membership in caucus, specifically the issue of expulsion or readmission to caucus, an area that is unclear in terms of constitutional convention about whether or not that power currently resides in the hands of party leaders or actually is something by convention that is with caucuses. This would certainly clarify it.

The third area of change is that Bill C-586 would legislate rules for the House of Commons caucus members to remove the leader—and it is very important to note—of a recognized party in Parliament, while at the same time leaving untouched the party's rules for selecting the leader of what we call the registered party or the extraparliamentary party. This would lead to some confusion on the part of the public and commentators, and I will come back to it, but the third element involves the ability to remove the leader in Parliament.

I have indicated that I welcome the bill. I believe it is important. It will stimulate debate, and it already has, at a time when it is hard to say that there is not a malaise in our parliamentary system and a recognition of that by the public.

My hon. colleague has somehow tapped into a certain zeitgeist, the response in civil society to the bill. It reflects that, and obviously this is quite brave in the context of our parliamentary system that puts such a premium on party discipline, at the moment.

I would also like to make clear that everything is not sunlight here, in the sense that I believe—and some of the comments coming from farther down the chamber suggest this—that there is some element that this focuses on the experience of one party and some of the problems within that party's own organization. It does not necessarily mean I am not willing to act in solidarity through legislation to share the rules we already have. We already elect our caucus chairs. We have a leadership review at every convention, for example. Nonetheless there is an element of asking other parties to come to the rescue of one particular party. At least, that is my view of it.

● (1755)

Second, there are two elements here: reforming the Canada Elections Act and reforming the Parliament of Canada Act. They are not mutually necessary. The Parliament of Canada Act provisions on caucus governance, removal of the leader, et cetera, is really about the independence of MPs, regardless of their philosophy of representation, while the Canada Elections Act clauses about nomination contests really seem to be about localized democracy.

They do work together, certainly in the conception of my hon. colleague, but I do want to suggest that the two can be severed and that, from my perspective at the moment, the whole question of greater independence of MPs in caucus is where I would certainly want to be putting my emphasis.

There are three very good things about the bill that I would like to emphasis at this time. First, I do believe that the innovation of having province-wide nomination officers be the ones to sign off on candidates once they have been elected from a nomination contest is very much worth looking at, and I personally would support that.

Second, on the idea of electing caucus chairs, having specific rules around it is okay, although I think some of the rules have been too finely drafted in the bill. We might want to look at loosening them up. We currently have caucus chairs elected every year, and I would want to make sure that we do not have to get creative after this bill is passed to allow that to continue, because the bill states that caucus chairs would have to be elected after every general election and then in some other instances.

Third, I believe that the provision that gives the caucus control of its membership is perhaps the most important part of the bill. The idea that caucus, through a voting mechanism, would decide whether somebody should be expelled and readmitted certainly clarifies what is a hazy area. Whether it even approaches a constitutional convention or not, it is certainly hazy. This clarifies that this would no longer be the pure prerogative of the leader of a party.

I think this provision, in and of itself, would create significant independence and extra protection for free speech and for the decisions—sometimes complicated, angst-ridden decisions—on whether to exercise a vote contrary to what others in the party are doing. I think it respects the electorate who, when they vote, are voting for an MP, almost always, who represents a party.

At some level, the wish of the people to be represented by not just an individual but an individual from a party is thwarted when a person is ejected from caucus. I think it is all more the reason that the caucus should have a say.

I have indicated, however, that there is one provision about which I am a bit worried. The electoral district associations would be able to control the timing and the rules around nomination contests. At the same time, there is a provision that says the act's rules would prevail over any bylaws and constitutions of parties.

Therefore, apart from the mechanism that my hon. colleague has suggested, which is that there be always the ability to sort of coerce riding associations to adopt national rules as local rules because ultimately there can be a threat of de-registering, I would much prefer to see more clarity that says certain kinds of national rules unambiguously can apply.

The NDP has a policy whereby at least 50% of all electoral districts shall have women running as NDP candidates for election and the goal is that a minimum of 60% of electoral districts where the NDP has a reasonable chance of winning have women running as NDP candidates for election.

Also, we have a goal that a minimum of 15% of electoral districts where the NDP has a reasonable chance of winning should have NDP candidates for election who reflect the diversity of Canada and include representation of equity groups.

Therefore, it is not an entire coincidence that the current caucus has around 40 women and 5 members of the LGBTQ community. The process at the national level, although stated as a policy, has clear rules for each EDA to follow to make sure it has actually made the effort to contribute to the goal.

My concern is to make sure that this is unambiguously protected at the time at which this bill would emerge from committee, as I hope it will, because I will be voting for it to go to committee. I look forward to studying it.

● (1800)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank my colleague for bringing this forward. There has been a lot of discussion about this for quite some time, to say the least.

A lot of it is taking place electronically. A lot of it is taking place through many of the forums we see around here and outward. This is one of those issues where people say, “You guys only talk about this in the bubble of Ottawa”, but quite frankly, it has burst through the bubble and many people are talking about this across the country from coast to coast to coast.

I congratulate my colleague for bringing this discussion to the nation because, as he mentioned in his speech, each and every leader, dating back 50 or 60 years or more, has always talked about electoral reform and we have seen it managed at a snail's pace in many cases. What the member is attempting to do is say that some of the incremental changes that took place within legislation some time ago should be taken further; in other words, we have a choice.

Back in 1970, there was the requirement that, in order to have the party attached to one's name on a ballot, one had to have the signature of the party's leader. Anyone within this House and beyond who has ever run in a federal election, unless he or she is an independent, had to have that affixed next to his or her name or have a letter from the party's leader saying that he or she stands as the candidate. Candidates may have been elected through the electoral process within the party itself, by nomination as we normally call it, or by appointment for whatever reason. That is certainly within the ability of a party leader to do, because we must remember that what is required is the signature. Therefore, what my hon. colleague is doing is taking that and pushing it further to affect the two acts in question here.

Just to recap what was talked about thus far, the enactment would amend the Canada Elections Act. Nominations of contestants would be held by a party's electoral district association. Proof of the party's endorsement of prospective candidates would be provided by the nomination officer of the party's electoral district association, and now with other signatures, so there has been a slight change in that. I also commend the member for making that change based on a provincial designate.

There is a fundamental shift here in what we are looking at; that is, it would make it a local aspect of a nomination process. Originally, there was to be a nomination officer in each electoral district association. We have made a slight change. A lot of people are okay with that.

We also talked about some of the other changes the member would make, such as the ability of the caucus to eject a leader or to call for the vote on a leader. We also have that juxtaposed to the fact my hon. colleague pointed out, which is that in this country the process of selecting the leader of a party or ejecting a leader from that position would now also involve the caucus in a much more proactive way. That is something we have to address within this debate as well.

What I hope to do here today is present some of the facts and further this debate. I will not leave members in animated suspense, because I have not yet decided how I am going to vote, because I believe in debate in this House. I do believe I am leaning in one certain direction—God forbid that I tell anybody—but what I want to hear during this debate is this. In a private member's bill there is what we call a five-minute rebuttal that the mover of the bill gets to do. What I am planning on doing is being specific, which was started by my colleague from Quebec, and talk about some of the concerns that were brought about during our discussions not only within our caucus but within the structure itself of the Liberal Party of Canada. We are talking about some of the concerns around imposing the same rules by a single law to all parties and caucuses. The fact is that the parties are free to adapt and change the rules. With this bill, they would not be able to do that anymore.

● (1805)

It would be a precedent to allow Parliament, the party that holds the majority, to decide internal democratic rules for all parties. A majority of MPs may vote for the current provisions of the bill against the will of the majority of a specific caucus. For example, a caucus within the House may contain members from an entire region, not just one province, of the country. Therefore, that voice would get weighted in a certain direction for one particular reason.

Propositions for reform, trying to convince parties to implement it, the Liberal Party made specific changes about nomination processes in the past. The Conservatives are welcome to adopt these changes for themselves. This is why I think the colleague from Alberta asked the question about leaving it to the party itself to decide these rules and not make it institutionalized within Canadian law. There are concerns about how we police that once we break the law.

Leaders are chosen by caucuses alone in some places. While they also have the power to take them out of that leadership, and that has been the case in countries around the world, it is not the case in our country. Then there is the process of allowing caucus to play a major role in removing a leader from his or her position when, at the genesis of that, it did not play a role in selecting that leader. Many people within parties would certainly have that concern.

On the positive side, there are a few things I would like to talk about, and I am reflecting my own personal view. I want to return to the nomination process. I think the member is on to a fundamental concept of allowing local democracy to select the candidate of their choice.

There are mechanisms within parties. We have one called the green light committee, which decides whether a candidate is eligible to run for the party. There are certain things about candidates, whether they are passed or whether they support the principles of the party. These kinds of measures have to be analyzed by every party in the House. It is no good for one of us to condemn another party for having a stringent process, saying that it is against democracy. It is not. Otherwise, we would have candidates in all political parties, no matter what their ideology, who would run madly off on all directions on whatever issue they chose.

The member is infusing an element of local democracy that to me shows promise, especially when he made changes before tabling the bill. That was also a good thing to do.

Let us go back to caucus chairs. We currently select democratically our caucus chair and so forth, but to eject someone from caucus, we go back to the principles that my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville mentioned earlier. We can apply the same sort of misgivings about that.

I hope when we return for debate, my hon. colleague gets a chance to rebut some of those concerns we have. I know he has done it personally, but I would like to see him do it within the House as well.

However, I want to commend him for all the work he has done on this. Over the course of this debate, I hope we all reflect on what we have done over the past while as politicians, as representatives. I hope we can say that we believe in a local democracy and we believe that people living within the boundaries of our riding or province should have the fundamental say over who the candidate should be. Then there is whether the party should be the decider of who that person represents it in that riding. If that is the way we feel, then we all need to personally reflect upon that.

This is the long way of saying that we need to have a good think when it comes to this legislation. I certainly look forward to having more debate on it. Unfortunately, we are confined as to the time we have. I know a lot of my colleagues would say that I should send it to committee. That requires me to say yes in principle, and therein lies the debate.

● (1810)

Do we say yes in principle to this, that we want democratic reform, or does it currently go too far within legislation to confine parties on how they operate in the House, and by extension govern the country?

Again, I congratulate the member and I look forward to the following debate.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been consultation among all the parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That the order made Monday, May 26, 2014, pursuant to Standing Order 97.1, respecting the deferral of the recorded division on the motion to concur in the 13th Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, scheduled to take place on Wednesday, May 28, 2014, be discharged and the motion deemed adopted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

REFORM ACT, 2014

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-586, the reform act, addresses several issues, not one issue. All of these issues are part of a general problem or a cluster of problems that have been collectively referred to as Canada's democratic deficit. The democratic deficit can be summarized as follows. The ways in which the Canadian party system, including its caucus system operates, is considerably less democratic, on close inspection, than Canadians think it is, or think it ought to be.

Bill C-586 is divided into two parts, each of which amends a different statute, the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act. The two sets of amendments are concerned with issues that are completely unrelated other than the thematic similarity noted above. Therefore, each of the two parts of the bill has to be considered on its own merits. That means if one of those two parts turns out to be so seriously flawed that it cannot be fixed while the other is a useful improvement to the status quo, that would put all of us here into a quandary.

Let us start with the proposed amendments to the Canada Election Act.

Clauses 4 to 8 of Bill C-586 would create a position styled “nomination officer”. The nomination officer would have the

authority to approve, and therefore disallow, party candidates, a power that therefore would be removed from the leader of the political party. Each party would have, in each province, a single nomination officer, elected by presidents of the actual district associations in that province for a four year term.

I do not think that the creation of this new officer would actually eliminate the party's ability to refuse a candidate nomination, something that could have been done. It just centralizes this power in a different officer in what is an unintentional division of the powers of the leader, rather than the elimination of an unwarranted power, as I have to think would have been the idealized way of dealing with the problem of centralized authority over nominations.

We ought to ask this question. What is the purpose the leader's signature serves in the first place and why not just get rid of it altogether? The answer is this. A registered party has a brand, a trademark, like a franchise and this is not the property of any individual person or candidate to use for his or her own purposes or agenda, which might be quite divergent from those of the party. It belongs to the entire party, and one individual who goes significantly off message can destroy the electoral prospects of many candidates.

Those of us whose history dates back to the old Reform Party remember that we were all castigated as, among other things, western separatists, racists and so on, based on a few completely unrepresentative comments made by people who were not part of the party's overall philosophy and who were dealt with by having their nominations removed. These people sought to exploit the credibility that the party and its then leader, Preston Manning, were building. Therefore, this is something that is of no small significance.

The other thing we have to worry about, as we deal with the attempt to balance these two considerations, the importance of the trademark and the danger that the leader will misuse his or her powers, is that this splitting of power does not mean that it is not subject to abuse in the future. Interest groups or party factions could take over the position of nomination officer. This would allow them to control candidate approvals in a given province. The nomination power having a veto over candidates could effectively support one faction from the party or one aspirant for a leadership race. If anyone doubts that could happen, one need only to look at what happened in the Liberal Party during the Chrétien-Martin struggle for power. The fact is that there was a real problem in the way in which nominations were being controlled and distributed in order to favour one faction over another.

In a provision that has been almost entirely overlooked by the media, the Canada Elections Act would also be amended to allow electoral district associations to establish their own rules governing timing of nomination races and the rules governing nominations. Based on my own experience in my own constituency, dating back to my first nomination, there is a real danger of gatekeeping practices designed to keep out candidates other than the one who has been chosen by the then current board of the riding.

● (1815)

When I discussed my own experiences from way back then, I discovered that many other people had similar experiences. The fact is that having some oversight of the central party can serve a useful purpose, although I grant it can also be misused.

Let me turn now to the other half of the reform bill. Section 9 of the bill would amend the Parliament of Canada Act in four ways. First, it would for the first time ever come up with a definition of the word "caucus". Up until now, caucuses have been, from a statutory point of view, entirely informal. That is to say, they are creatures of usage, of convention, to the extent that they have ever been before the courts of the common law. Under a new section 49.1 of the Parliament of Canada Act a caucus would be defined as "a group composed solely of members of the House of Commons who are members of the same recognized party". That would exclude senators.

Second, third and fourth, since there were four changes here, the bill would create procedures for three processes that are not now governed by statute: first, for caucuses to remove and replace leaders; second, for caucuses to admit new members or expel existing members; and third, for electing and removing caucus chairs. I will not be able to deal with the election and removal of caucus chairs except to say that I think the process laid out in the bill is probably a pretty good one.

I do want to dwell, however, on the leadership election process. The first thing to understand here is that other Commonwealth countries, and the most frequently cited being the United Kingdom and Australia, do use a system similar to this for having caucuses choose their leaders. There is no doubt about that.

Neither of those two countries, none of the others I am aware of, nor any of the Australian states, none of the sovereign jurisdictions we are looking at, have statutes dictating the process by which this occurs. These are entirely dealt with by the parties themselves. We know, for example, that the rules used by the labour party in Britain are not the same as those used by the conservative party in Britain. The labour party requires 20% of the caucus to trigger a leadership review and the British Tories require 15%. The British liberal democrats, an entirely different system, require 75 local riding associations to trigger a review.

The systems are different again in Australia and they are not unproblematic. To make this point I am going to give the House the history of recent leadership reviews in the Australian labour party.

There is a Wikipedia article on absolutely every subject under the sun, including leadership spills in Australia, the term used for a leadership review vote. I want members to keep count. Leadership spill one, June 2003, Mark Latham attempts to oust Simon Crean as leader of the labour party. He fails. Number two, in December, he succeeds. Number three, in December 2006, Crean and Latham are both gone but Kim Beazley is kicked out by Kevin Rudd. Number four, Kevin Rudd, who is now prime minister, is replaced by Julia Gillard. Number five, Kevin Rudd is not replaced by Julia Gillard, although there is an attempt. Number six, March 2013, Simon Crean attempts to cause Julia Gillard to be replaced by Simon Rudd who refuses to participate. Number seven, in June 2013, Kevin Rudd replaces Julia Gillard as leader of the party through their seventh leadership spill in the space of a decade. Shortly after that the labour party loses the election and then changes its rules to make sure that this kind of serial replacement of leaders is stopped.

The reason I have mentioned all of this is not because Australia's system is good or bad, but it is to make the point that it had the power to change its own rules because it was not entrenched in statute. That is the significant point.

Let me turn now to the very last point I want to deal with and that is the expulsion of members of caucus by means of a vote of the caucus. The proposed law would allow for a 50% vote to expel a member from a caucus. There would be no other way of expelling a member from a caucus. That is not a bad way of handling things.

I do not however like the proposal that members would be able, by means of collecting a series of signatures without revealing their identities, to begin this process. We would not get to do this under this proposed legislation when trying to replace a leader but we could when we are trying to kick a colleague out of caucus. I for one would want to be able to face my accusers if they were attempting to kick me out of the Conservative caucus.

Whatever happens, we can expect that if the bill goes forward and finds its way before a committee that would be one change that I would be looking for and there would be some others as well.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, I wish to inform the hon. member for Pontiac that he will have only six minutes for his speech. He will therefore have four minutes to complete it when the House resumes debate.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will make full use of the six minutes allocated for my speech.

It is somewhat unfortunate because this bill raises some very interesting and fundamental questions regarding the health of our democracy. I would just like to congratulate my Conservative colleague for having the courage to confront the issue, his own party and the Prime Minister. I know that the member is sincere and that he shares my passion for protecting our democracy.

Democracy, its transparency and its responsibility are not partisan issues.

● (1825)

[*English*]

In fact, they are questions of the tension between authoritarianism and freedom. In history, we have seen that authoritarianism is not limited to the left or to the right. Authoritarian governments have been both right-wing and left-wing. The only safeguard against what is an inherent tendency in our political system to gain power and to want to maintain it is to balance this tendency with what I call multiple localities of power; that is, a sharing of power between various jurisdictions and segments of society.

I think what characterizes a healthy, modern democracy is power sharing. This is done in many ways, both tacitly and implicitly in our society. For example, we can point out the free market system that, with its profit motive, contains contradictions, it is true, with regard to the expression of freedom, with its tendency to deny the right of access to capital and to the means of production, labour mobility, free association labour movements, et cetera, but, nonetheless, at least in its social democratic expression, and my colleague will forgive me for that, provide fundamental room in expressing oneself in freely formed relationships between human beings.

We can all think about the sharing of power within civil society at large, as well. There are vast areas of our society that are not political, thank God, yet function in a free and open manner where the right of association is clearly established and actually creates shared power, spontaneous shared power structures separate from government, which are freely made and freely associated in. This is not to mention the ballot box and universal suffrage that, in my opinion, can be fundamentally improved in our democratic system; for example, by moving to a mixed-member proportional and more democratic system than the first past the post system. However, that is neither here nor there.

However, when we talk about political parties, there is something fundamental that goes on. We have to admit that they are different animals than other types of associations, corporations, or groups. Why? Political parties are in the business of taking power and maintaining power. They are, by their very nature, political. Electoral laws also tend to institutionally favour already established parties and discourage the formation of new political parties.

My colleagues across the hall would probably be more familiar with that than I am, with the whole Reform Party experience.

However, within a free market system, political parties are also financed through private means; therefore, they are also directly related to money, which opens them to all contradictions of our economic system, as mentioned earlier, even more so with the elimination of the electoral return and the public support of the political parties, which was meant to level the playing field. This is unfortunate.

I do lament the fact that this bill would not address these problems, both within our electoral laws and the financing of political parties, because I think that these are the fundamental issues and the very basis of what is wrong with our democracy and why there is so much cynicism and a lack of participatory action within our country today, at a political point of view.

Also, we have to mention that political parties make their own rules. The Conservative Party and the Liberal Party have a long history of being flawed democratic institutions. Their relationship to Bay Street, where the oil industry is too close for them to represent the true interest of the majority of Canadians, is an example.

[*Translation*]

In its current form, the NDP is much more democratic because it is the only party that has a leadership review every two years. Furthermore, it is the only party that would subject a sitting prime minister to such a review. Since the last election, for example, Jack Layton and our leader have had such reviews. No other party has had a leadership race and two reviews in the past two and a half years. Furthermore, the NDP already elects its caucus chair. We also have transparent processes for choosing a leader.

[*English*]

Nonetheless, how political parties are structured and work, and in particular the relationship between the party and its elected officials, is clearly a blind spot in our democracy. I commend the member for shedding some considerable light on this issue.

Like many Canadians, I am deeply concerned about the highly concentrated power that the government has created in the Prime Minister's Office and his cabinet. We must remain vigilant lest our democracy slip. The fact is that a majority government in this country with a Senate that is undemocratic yields too much power.

One of these powers is the control of its own caucus and elected members, a democratic deficit this bill partially attempts to address.

I will finish the rest when I have four minutes at the next hour of debate. I am thankful for the attention of the members.

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): As the hon. member mentioned, he will have four minutes when the House resumes debate on this motion. It will not be today.

[*English*]

The time provided for the consideration of this item of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(7), the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-560 under private members' business.

* * *

DIVORCE ACT

The House resumed from March 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-560, An Act to amend the Divorce Act (equal parenting) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-560, an act to amend the Divorce Act in relation to equal parenting and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

My heart goes out to all those struggling through the breakup of a marriage, divorce, court cases for custody, and wanting more time with their children.

While I appreciate the terrible anguish of parents who want to spend more time with their children and the mover of the bill's intent —namely, to have two caring, engaged, and loving parents in children's lives—I believe the bill is fundamentally flawed in putting parental rights before the rights of children, the most precious and vulnerable among us.

The former Conservative minister of justice and Attorney General of Canada, in speaking to the Canadian Bar Association's annual conference in 2009 about equal parenting and the predecessor to this legislation, namely Bill C-422, stated that the best interests of the child are always paramount, and should be.

Bill C-560 was introduced by the member of Parliament for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin on December 12, 2013. This is not the first time the hon. member has introduced a bill regarding this matter.

The most significant changes that the bill would bring to the Divorce Act include the following: removing the current definition of custody from the Divorce Act and replacing it with parenting, defined as "the act of assuming the role of a parent to a child, including custody and all of the rights and responsibilities commonly and historically associated with the role of a parent"; creating a presumption that "allocating parenting time equally between the spouses is in the best interests of a child" and that "equal parental responsibility is in the best interests of a child"; adding factors that courts must consider in making custody orders; and altering the law on parental mobility.

The bill would represent a disservice both to children and to families by taking the focus away from children in favour of parental rights, detracting from the individual justice required by the Divorce Act, and promoting further and more fractious litigation.

The Divorce Act currently establishes that the best interests of the child are the paramount consideration in child custody cases. In other words, the rights of the parent are subordinate to the interests of the child. Bill C-560 seeks to weaken this in favour of the rights of the parents.

The best-interests-of-the-child test has been a fundamental part of most legislation relating to children for many years. It is used in federal legislation under the following acts: the Citizenship Act, the Divorce Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act. It is also used in some provincial legislation dealing with matters such as adoption legislation; child protection legislation; and custody, access, and child support for unmarried couples.

Equal parenting as defined in the bill appears to have received support from some observers, particularly certain parents' groups, but so far it has not received much support from the legal community.

The Canadian Bar Association, or CBA, represents some 37,000 lawyers, judges, notaries, law teachers, and law students from across Canada. The CBA's mandate includes improvement in the law and the administration of justice. The CBA family law section includes family lawyers from every part of the country. They are collaborative arbitrators, litigators, mediators, parenting coordinators, and practitioners. Their clients include children, fathers, mothers, grandparents, step-parents, surrogates, and so on.

The CBA family section believes that any discussion of "parental rights" is misguided when resolving arrangements for children and that the sole focus must be what is best for children. The CBA therefore opposes Bill C-560, as it would shift the way custody is determined under the Divorce Act to parents' rights and away from what is in the best interests of children.

● (1835)

Lawyers assist all family members during what are often impossibly difficult times in restructuring their responsibilities and arrangements following separation and divorce. As a result, the CBA family section sees the issue from all sides. The CBA firmly believes that the only perspective to foster outcomes that are best for children is to require that the courts and parents focus solely on the children's interests in making decisions.

While the bill refers to equal parenting, it would not actually advance equality. Rather, it would change the primary focus in custody and access matters from what is best for children to equal parental rights.

"Parenting is not about adults claiming rights", says Patricia Hebert of Edmonton, vice-chair of CBA's national family law section. "It is about the desire and ability to put children's interests first".

She continues:

> The bill is based on the faulty assumption that equal parenting time will work for all families, regardless of abilities, circumstances, needs, history, challenges or attitudes of all those involved. In reality, the proposed change is clearly about promoting parents' views of equality at the expense of the interests of children, who are affected by their parents' separation.

The CBA agrees that shared parenting is a good outcome for many families. Where equal time and responsibility can be shown to be in the best interests of children, judges can and do make that order under the current law, but the CBA understands that one size does not fit all.

The CBA objects to the proposed legislation, which says equal parenting time and responsibility must be ordered in every case. This would require judges to justify any other outcome by ruling that the best interests of the child would be "substantially enhanced" by a non-equal regime. This clearly makes children's interests a very low priority, which is contradictory to the stated goals of Canadian family laws as well as Canada's obligations under the Hague convention on the rights of the child.

Finally, I would like to bring forth questions asked by my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Charlottetown, of the current Minister of Justice regarding Bill C-560 at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. My colleague asked:

> A private member's bill is coming before the House, C-560, dealing with the Divorce Act. Back in 2009, your predecessor...indicated that the best interests of the child are always paramount. Given that this question is about to come before the House, what are your views on that, sir?

The Minister of Justice answered:

> I can tell you, having practised some family law—as you have in Prince Edward Island—that the long-held legal maxim and the jurisprudence definitely supports that the best interests of the child will remain the primary concern. I see no change in that regard.

In closing, children must always be our primary concern. This legislation seeks to weaken that. This is not acceptable to the Liberal Party of Canada. This is not acceptable to the Canadian Bar Association. This is not acceptable to the present Minister of Justice or to the former Minister of Justice. This is why we will oppose the bill.

● (1840)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak on Bill C-560, an act to amend the Divorce Act with regard to equal parenting and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

The preamble to the bill states a number of objectives, including that of encouraging divorcing parents to take more responsibility for their disputes with less reliance on the adversarial processes.

I would like to focus my remarks on the stated objective of the bill in order to demonstrate how this concept is consistent with our government's current approach to divorce and matrimonial settlements.

We all know that divorce is often a messy and drawn-out process in which both sides have deeply rooted resentments toward one another.

Unfortunately, at times divorce is unavoidable and happens quite frequently in our society. However, rather than turning to the courts and other adversarial processes to find a neat and tidy solution to an otherwise complex and messy situation, our government has taken the approach of encouraging and supporting both sides to find a mutually agreed upon resolution themselves.

In the context of separation and divorce, when parents are able to work together and put their children's needs and interests first, they provide a supportive environment for their children during an often challenging time. This is an important step in allowing these kids to achieve their full potential.

Working together and minimizing conflict are important and necessary goals for the approximately 70,000 married couples who divorce in Canada each year.

While the government cannot support Bill C-560, as it moves away from a strong focus on the best interests of the child, I thought it would be helpful to outline for my colleagues some of the ways in which this government is already promoting the goal of encouraging parents to take more responsibility for the resolution of their disputes.

First, this government contributes funding to a wide range of family justice services that have been shown to support co-operation and minimize conflict.

Second, this government has developed various publications to help families deal with divorce, including a booklet for children to help them understand and cope with their parents' divorce as well as a parenting guide and tools that encourage parents to co-operate with each other and that help them prepare a parenting plan that would best suit the needs of their children.

The phrase “family justice services” refers to all programs and services that meaningfully contribute to the resolution of family law issues. Those to which this government contributes funding include information and resource centres, alternative dispute resolution services, parent and child education programs, and services directed at high-conflict situations.

Here is a brief description of each type.

Information and resource centres offer free information on family law and court procedures. As a general rule, these centres do not give legal advice. However, they give out necessary information and documents, such as court forms, and provide some guidance on the steps in legal proceedings. They also refer families to legal and community resources to help meet their needs.

An alternative dispute resolution process that is widely funded by governments is mediation. A mediator is a neutral third party who helps the parents discuss issues on which they disagree. The mediator does not take sides, but may make suggestions to help the parents communicate better and reach an agreement. The mediator does not replace a lawyer.

Parent education and information programs are usually run by lawyers and social workers. They often work together to help parents understand and cope with the emotional effects of separation and divorce on themselves and their children, deal with some of the challenges of parenting after separation, and learn techniques for communicating better with each other, resolving disputes, and co-parenting. Some of these programs are also available on government websites and in other formats. This helps to make them more accessible to those living in remote areas.

Some provinces and territories have developed special education and counselling programs for children that help them cope emotionally with the breakdown of their family and understand that their parents' divorce is not their fault.

Finally, there are family justice services designed to help in situations in which there are concerns about the safety of children and the other parent. As a key example, service providers, generally with social work experience, supervise visits between a parent and a child, or they may supervise the transfer of a child from one parent to another when there is a high degree of conflict between the parents.

I would like to emphasize that these programs and services are developed and administered by the provinces and territories. As many members are aware, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments share constitutional responsibility for family law, and the administration of justice is a provincial/territorial responsibility. The federal government is responsible for divorce, including custody and support when dealt with as part of the divorce. In all other situations, the provincial and territorial governments are responsible for custody and support.

● (1845)

Since 1985, the federal government has provided funds to provinces and territories to develop and improve services and programs that assist separating and divorcing families. The current funding program entitled the "supporting families fund" has two objectives: one, to contribute to the continued improvement to access to the family justice system; and two, to encourage greater parental compliance with family obligations, notably support and parenting arrangements.

To fulfill these objectives, the fund was recently renewed for three years, until 2017, to provide $15.5 million per year to the provinces and territories for the delivery of family justice services to help parents resolve their issues and comply with their family obligations for the benefit of their children. The fund also provides $500,000 per year to non-governmental organizations to develop targeted family justice information and training resources. By helping to reduce conflict and increase co-operation between parents, these family justice services promote better outcomes for children.

The second way in which this government supports the goals of co-operation and minimizing conflict is to make available on the government website information and other tools that can help children cope with divorce and help parents develop parenting arrangements that respond to the needs of their children.

The government recognizes that children need information as well as adults and has developed *What happens next?*, a booklet for children between the ages of nine and twelve whose parents are separating or divorcing. It gives them basic explanations of key legal terms and also discusses the emotions they may be feeling. The children's calendar helps children keep track of their schedule and important dates as they move between houses.

The guide entitled *Making plans* gives parents information about issues they need to address when developing parenting arrangements, including a schedule for the time children will be under the care of each parent. It also suggests processes parents can use to agree on a plan, such as mediation, negotiation, and collaborative law, and provides tips on how to include their child's perspective. This guide promotes agreement between parents by emphasizing the importance of communicating, reducing conflict, and building a co-parenting relationship that focuses on the best interests of the child.

The parenting plan tool is a companion to *Making plans*. It is a practical guide with sample clauses to help parents develop a written parenting plan setting out their parenting arrangement.

Finally, the federal government worked with our colleagues in the provinces and territories to develop a parenting plan checklist to help parents identify issues to consider when developing a parenting plan.

The need for public legal education and information materials such as these, as well as for family justice services, is widely recognized. Recently, the Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters, a group broadly representative of leaders across Canada in the field of civil and family justice, and chaired by Supreme Court of Canada Justice Thomas Cromwell, emphasized the value of front-end services, such as those family justice services funded by this government, especially those that include "live" help. It noted that:

> It is widely recognized that the provision of services early in a dispute helps to minimize both the cost and duration of the dispute and thus to mitigate the possibility of protracted conflict and the corresponding harm to family relationships.

The committee was equally adamant that:

> The more that families can effectively take responsibility for the resolution of their own disputes, the better.... This push towards family autonomy...[must be] balanced by a corresponding public obligation to ensure that these families are given appropriate help in doing so.

I want to reassure the House that we take that public obligation seriously. That is why I have taken the time to explain today some of the ways in which we are contributing to high-quality front-end services that support the many Canadian families experiencing family breakdown.

I have highlighted the supporting families fund and the development of public legal education and information materials. Further, the government will review the custody and access provisions of the Divorce Act and, in so doing, will consider how it can further encourage parents to rely less on adversarial processes and focus on the needs of their children.

● (1850)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I started at Dalhousie law school in 2001, and in my second year I took family law with the great Rollie Thompson, one of the foremost thinkers on family law in Canada. If he is watching right now, he is laughing out loud at home because I said that; but he is a great thinker when it comes to family law, and I was really lucky to be able to take that class with him.

There is one thing he drilled into our heads over and over again. Yes, it is the law, but he made sure we fully understood what it meant, and that was the best interests of the child. We talked about different scenarios and hypotheticals, such as what we would do if we were judges with a certain case in front of us and how we would make the decision. We talked about the best interests of the child, because when it comes to conflict about custody and access in Canada, the paramount guiding principle under the Divorce Act, and also in many pieces of provincial custody and access legislation, is the best interests of the child.

What does that mean? It does not mean mom; it does not mean dad; it does not mean grandparents. It is the bests interests of the child. I point out that it also does not mean children across the board. That was a tricky thing for us to understand as law students. The question was not what the best would be for the children, writ large; it was this child who stood before us, who had a specific case, a specific family situation in a specific geographic area of Canada. There were all kinds of different considerations, such as socio-economic considerations, and it was about this child before us.

When we consider the best interests of this child who stands before us, there can be many different possibilities under the legislation. There can be equal time. Equal time is allowed under the Divorce Act. There can be sole custody by one parent with access by another parent. There can be sole custody by one parent and no access by the other, because it may be determined that in the best interests of this child, he or she should not have contact with a parent. There are all kinds of circumstances where that occurs.

Shared custody is an option as well, and it is even possible to have a scenario where a child has a different set of circumstances from that of his or her sibling. Again, I come back to the idea that it is not about what is best for children; but it is this child, not his or her brother or sister; this child. It goes back to the idea that the most important thing that we consider is the child standing before us, and that is the root of the law when looking at family law and how to deal with custody and access. It is beautiful and elegant. It is an elegant concept. Let us forget about who lives where and who has more money or anything like that. What is the best scenario for this child?

The bill before us would instruct judges to find a presumption of equal sharing of parenting responsibilities. This could be rebutted. It is a rebuttable presumption if a party can show that the best interests of the child would be "substantially enhanced" to do otherwise. Even if I thought this bill was a good idea or creating this rebuttable presumption was a good idea, which I do not and I will explain why later, this is a significant departure from Canadian family law. It is a significant departure. Even if I thought this was a good idea, in no way could anyone possibly think that something as significant as this concept, this reversal, this rebuttable presumption, should be changed through a private member's bill.

I know I am talking process here, but process is important. Not everybody knows that private members' legislation is different. It gets very limited debate. There are two hours at second reading and maybe a couple of days at committee. One would think a couple of days is big, but a committee meeting is just two hours. Then there are two hours at third reading. Therefore, we are talking about four hours of debate in the House.

The best interests of the child is the cornerstone of our federal Divorce Act, the cornerstone of custody and access laws provincially, and part of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is something to which Canada is a signatory, and we cannot possibly think that four hours of debate would be sufficient for changing this concept.

● (1855)

The mover of the bill is speaking to this bill; I am speaking to this bill; there is a smattering of other MPs who are speaking tonight; and that is it. We are just going to have this four hours of debate. Members cannot think that there is enough thought or insight or discussion here tonight that could support this fundamental change to family law. That is in the make-believe world where I think this is a good decision.

However, I do not support this bill. I do not support it in any way, shape, or form, thanks in large part to the constant drilling of the best interests of the child by Rollie Thompson, my family law professor. This is the most important concept.

I am going to quote the Canadian Bar Association.

> The Bill would represent a disservice both to children and families by:
>
> taking the focus away from children in favour of parental rights
>
> detracting from the individual justice required by the Divorce Act and
>
> promoting further and more fractious litigation.

Litigation; we often hear how we need to change the Divorce Act. We need to change this idea of best interests of the child because there is all this litigation and it is so difficult. Yes, it is difficult. Of course it is difficult. However, there are lots of avenues for parents to take, so they do not actually have to resort to litigation.

When the focus is on the best interests of the child, it makes parents take stock for a minute. It makes them take a deep breath and focus on their children, rather than themselves. With this concept, they are more likely to put aside their differences. They are more likely to put aside their self-interest and to work to a resolution that works for their family.

This bill would actually make that consideration of the child secondary. I cannot support a law that is going to make the child second.

In coming up to this debate, I was contacted by a constituent of mine. He asked me to support this bill. He shared a heartbreaking story, a truly heartbreaking story of his situation with his ex-spouse and kids. He told me about how sole custody was used as a weapon against him and held out as a reward for his ex-spouse.

We are contacted often by people who want us to support legislation or to not support legislation, vote for or against, but his story really did stick with me. It was a very difficult story to read. There are always individual situations that do not fit or somehow do not work, but when I looked at his situation and he told me about everything he had gone through, I could not help but think about how much different his situation would be if we had support for parents, if we had access to justice, if people could actually access the courts and have legal representation.

I think that the goal of this bill, which is co-parenting, would be better served by greater funding for parental education, for access to justice, for access to legal representation and to counselling services. It would be better served by those things than it would by this bill.

I do not have a lot of time left. In doing research for this bill, I found there is a fantastic paper put together by the Canadian Bar Association. It was about a previous incarnation of this bill. I remember when this bill was introduced in the last Parliament. I was deputy justice critic, and my colleague the member for Windsor—Tecumseh was justice critic. We met with lots of folks to talk about the implications of this bill.

I will say the CBA discussion paper is fantastic. I wanted to quote from it, but I probably do not have a lot of time. I am going to make one quote. It talks about this committee that existed in Parliament, a special joint committee on child custody and access.

> The Committee recommended:
>
> a series of criteria defining the best interests of the child, among which would be the principle that children benefit from consistent, meaningful contact with both parents, except in exceptional cases, such as those where violence has occurred and continues to pose a risk to the child. Whether an equal time-sharing arrangement is in the interests of a particular child would have to be determined on a case-by-case basis, with a full evaluation of the child's and parents' circumstances.
>
> ...the Committee said that "legislation that imposes or presumes joint custody as the automatic arrangement for divorcing families would ignore that this might not be suitable for all families, especially those with a history of domestic violence or very disparate parenting roles".

I know my time is up. I thank the Speaker for being a little lenient.

● (1900)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak this evening on Bill C-560, although I must admit it is not a fun topic to deal with. Certainly, there have been all too many, usually young fathers, come to me in states of depression and desperation because they had been denied access or given very limited access to their child because of a divorce and a bad decision made by the courts and our justice system.

Bill C-560 would amend the Divorce Act to direct the courts to make equal shared parenting the presumptive arrangement for children following the divorce of their parents, except in proven cases of abuse or neglect. The key point of this legislation is that when parents divorce each other, they do not divorce their children. These amendments would keep both parents in the lives of more children in those cases where marriages break down. Bill C-560 would require parents to co-operate in establishing equal shared parenting unless they can make a credible compelling case that this would not be in the best interest of the child.

I have heard tonight many, mostly lawyers but not all, who have said that they favour a system where decisions are made based in the best interest of a child. Well, the simple truth is that a child having both parents is what is in the best interest of a child in most cases.

Far too often, cases are being decided by our courts that do not make decisions that are in the best interest of the child. I believe that the law is an ass, so to speak, in far too many cases.

I have seen the fallout of that, and it is not fun. There is nothing that wrenches at one's gut and strikes at the heart in a negative way more so than a parent, again, usually a young father, who is being denied access to his child for no good reason. It is not because they are any threat to the child, but it is because of a bad court decision. I believe that this legislation would make the outcome positive in far more cases.

Just over half of the number of divorcing couples today make their own arrangements for seeing their children without needing court intervention. For those who do need to use family courts, an equal shared parenting presumption would eliminate a key incentive for acrimonious conflict.

It is this conflict that breaks the heart, and breaks the will in many cases, and also makes lawyers rich. Of course, I would not be surprised if many lawyers did not support this legislation. I am not suggesting that all lawyers would oppose this just because they would be denied legal fees, I am not that crass, but certainly I believe that kind of thinking does come into things far too often.

Bill C-560 would foster settlements and reduce litigation due to the requirement that a parent seeking primary parent status must establish the best interest of the children, which means the focus under Bill C-560 is substantially enhanced by the disproportionate parenting time.

Studies have consistently shown that it is the very existence of custody litigation itself that causes the most harm to children. Bill C-560 focuses on the right of the child to know and to love two primary parents in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A marked drop in the use of litigation has been seen in Australia following recent equal parenting reforms in that country. This outcome was expected by advocates of equal parenting and runs counter to the scaremongering from opponents who falsely claim that equal shared parenting would produce great conflict among divorced parents and their children. That is simply not what has happened.

Another myth surrounding this bill is that it would impose a cookie-cutter, once-size-fits-all outcome on all divorcing families.

● (1905)

It would not do that. In fact, the opposite is true. The status quo is the cookie-cutter approach, with more than 75% of family court custody decisions being in favour of sole custody for the mother. That is a cookie-cutter approach. It is not a healthy one and it is not one that should be continued in this country.

We clearly see the de facto presumption in operation in today's family courts. Amending the Divorce Act to include a presumption of equal shared parenting, therefore, would not be a radical change to the current law. More importantly, it would be a change that replaces a parental rights framework for one that prioritizes the best interest of the child or children.

The current adversarial litigation system of settling child-related disputes is focused on parental rights. Parents are the ones represented by counsel and are the parties in the dispute. Each parent asserts that they are the better parent and are better able to meet the child's needs, and each parent defends against unfair or mistaken attacks on their parenting from the other parent. As a result, the courts are clogged with bitter, divisive, and financially devastating custody litigation between parents fighting over children like they are property.

I would also like to clarify that Bill C-560 would not impose the one-size-fits-all requirement of an exact 50-50 residential arrangement for the children of divorced parents at both parents' new homes. It would establish equal shared parenting as a starting point for parents and courts to use as they work toward a solution, typically in the range of 35% to 50% in residential access of the child to each parent, according to the unique circumstances of each family.

The international organization Leading Women for Shared Parenting reports that:

> Research also proves that, although children want a relationship with both their parents regardless of marital status, healthy bonding with a...parent is impossible without a substantial amount of time spent in that parent's physical presence.

That means very close to equal, again, in a 35% to 50% range for each parent.

Bill C-560 aims to implement selected best practices from other jurisdictions to encourage parents to make consensual decisions, to reduce conflict and costly legal battles, and to ensure that both parents have the option of equal time with their children, unless they are proven unfit. Equal time as a starting point in the divorce process means that both parents need not fear the arbitrary loss of their children.

I have got so much more that I want to say, but I see that my time is almost up. I will close by saying that we know, from the best social science research, a body of research that is growing every day, that ordinary children thrive most and produce the best outcomes when raised by both of their biological parents. This is what this bill is about. It could play a very important role indeed in helping to ensure that this is what happens, that the best rights of the child are considered and that it means, in most cases, near equal access to each of their parents. It is a result that is clearly, as I have said before, in the best interest of the child.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to a subject I feel strongly about, children's rights. The bill currently being considered by the House poses a serious risk to the rights of Canadian children, which is why I would like to voice my opposition the current iteration of Bill C-560.

Bill C-560, as introduced by my colleague, the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, amends the Divorce Act by replacing the concept of custody orders with that of parenting orders. The legislation instructs judges, when making a parenting order, to apply the principle of equal parenting unless it is established that the best interests of the child would be substantially enhanced by allocating parental responsibility other than equally.

This change to the legislation, which may, at first glance, appear innocuous, has significant consequences for thousands of Canadian families that have to navigate the already difficult experience of divorce.

The main effect of the bill is that it gives priority to the best interests of parents, rather than of the child, when a parenting order is issued. However, in my opinion, it is absolutely essential that the criteria of the best interests of the child remain the primary consideration in decisions made by judges regarding custody.

In this regard, I stand squarely behind the opinion issued by the Quebec Bar Association, which publicly announced its opposition to Bill C-560. Allow me to read a couple of excerpts from the letter that the Bar Association sent to the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin. I completely agree with the opinion of Bar Association and, at the same time, remain hopeful that the member will bear in mind the expert opinion and jurisprudence on the issue.

In his letter, the president of the Quebec Bar Association expressed the following opinion:

> The bill being studied was preceded by two other bills, introduced in 2009 and 2002, that also included the concepts of "parenting orders" and "parental responsibility". The 2002 bill was the result of a Canada-wide reflection that lasted more than a decade.
>
> In 2001, at the invitation of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Family Law Committee, the Barreau du Québec participated in this reflection and attended a conference on the subject.
>
> A brief was prepared. The Canadian government's final report on custody and access and child support payments, entitled "Putting Children's Interest First", along with Bill C-22, were the culmination of that extensive consultation. One of the most important conclusions that came out of the consultation concerned the rejection of all assumptions about child custody and the importance of maintaining the flexible criterion of the interest of the child along with the "friendly parent" and "maximum contact" principles. This conclusion was endorsed by the vast majority of those who participated in the consultation, which targeted numerous social and legal groups across Canada.
>
> Bill C-560 proposes amendments that are contrary to the conclusions that came out of that 2001 consultation, particularly in relation to child custody. One of the legislator's objectives is to have the Divorce Act include, under the expression "equal parenting responsibility", a presumption of joint parental authority and a presumption of shared custody.

Why does the bill disregard a decade of consultation? Why does it fail to take into account the opinion of experts?

The difficult experience of divorce and the issue of custody already place huge pressure on families and especially on children. However, the current bill would force judges to put the interests of the child second, behind the right of parents to equal custody.

This shift has serious consequences and may have an adverse effect on the healthy development of the child. Judges already consider the option of equal shared custody as the optimal solution for a divorced couple with a child, if indeed this option is in the best interests of the child.

What, therefore, is the point of this bill when the legislative tools at our disposal already provide us with the option of equal shared custody?

Canadian judges are competent and know what to do. In the face of ongoing family conflict, it is quite simply not in the interests of the child to be in a situation where the parents share equal custody. Moreover, where in this bill is the opinion of the child taken into account? Does it come second to the custody rights of parents?

Of course, the NDP will always stand up for gender equality, and the rights of fathers are just as important as the rights of mothers.

● (1910)

However, this bill misses the mark, since it in no way moves us in the direction of equality. Rather, it diminishes the rights of the child, and it is high time that the debate refocused on the real issue at hand: the best interests of the child.

It is also important to avoid relinquishing any legislative space to parents who, in the throes of divorce, often lack perspective and judgment. This vulnerability may cause one parent to use custody of the child to attack the other parent. Sometimes parents' claims come from a selfish place rather than from a place of genuine concern for the best interests of the child. This must be avoided at all costs.

I will say it again: I share the opinion of the Barreau du Québec, which is that the best interests of the child must take precedence over any other consideration when it comes to custody rights.

I would also like to inform my colleagues that the opinion of the national family law section of the Canadian Bar Association is that Bill C-560 puts the rights of parents before the best interests of the child. The association further argues that:

> Parenting is not about adults claiming rights…It is about the desire and ability to put children's interests first.

The association goes on to say:

> The bill is based on the faulty assumption that equal parenting time will work for all families, regardless of abilities, circumstances, needs, history, challenges or attitudes of all those involved...
>
> In reality, the proposed change is clearly about promoting parents' views of equality at the expense of the interests of children, who are affected by their parents' separation.

I hope that my colleagues will also consider this expertise when it comes time to vote.

In closing, I would like to express my concern about two other aspects of the bill. First, this bill allows custody orders that have already been made by a judge to be changed. From what I understand, an application for judicial review can be submitted for any sole-custody orders, and the courts will now have to apply the presumption of shared custody. This gives a certain amount of retroactive power to change decisions that were already made in an appropriate manner in light of the facts presented to the judge.

Finally, there also seems to be a desire to rank a number of criteria that the judge must consider when rendering a decision. How can the child's opinion and family violence be ranked lower than maximum parental contact? That does not make any sense, and it represents a major setback in terms of child and family law when compared to the laws in most other western countries.

I would like to close by saying that when parents are more concerned about their children than themselves, they are more likely to forget their differences and their own interests and find a solution that works well for their family. The existing laws already offer the possibility of equal shared custody, if that solution is in the best interest of the child.

Rather than restricting the rights of children, I urge all my colleagues to think about more constructive solutions that will enable us to develop tools and provide families with the resources they need to deal with the painful transition of divorce. Parents who are better equipped will be able to minimize the negative effects of divorce on their children's development and well-being.

● (1915)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Lethbridge, I will let the hon. member know he will have not the full 10 minutes but in fact about seven minutes left in the time remaining for debate on this question.

The hon. member for Lethbridge.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking in support of Bill C-560, which is the bill to amend the Divorce Act to make equal shared parenting arrangements for children following the divorce of their parents, except in proven cases of abuse or neglect.

I must admit that when this bill was first tabled and started to get some public attention and I started to pay attention to it, I was a bit surprised to see how controversial it became. I expected that most people would be in favour of it. That is part of the reason we have debate. It is because sometimes assumptions are challenged. I will say that the arguments against the bill seem as sincere as the arguments in favour of it.

I do not want to say anything about the intent of people who disagree with me on this bill. However, I will say that at home, when I have the occasional constituent come to talk to me about divorce law and family law problems, without exception, the problems have been fathers feeling that they are not getting fair representation through the courts and that the whole system is stacked against fathers having access to their children.

I want to make very clear that my support for this bill is not about preserving fathers' rights. It is not about mothers' rights. It is about the children's rights. It is not just about their rights but about the good of the children. When we talk about the good of the children, sometimes I wonder why we always say, "it is for the good of the children". Why do children get this emphasis that other human beings do not get? It is not that children are more important. It is that children have not done anything to cause the grief they receive because of the mistakes adults make. Also, children just happen to be the people who will turn into adults who run the world, and if we have the children's best interests at heart and in mind, and we actually look after the children's best interests, by extension, we cannot fail in looking after the best interests of society as a whole.

Beyond children in and of themselves, when we have the best interests of families at heart and the best interests of families in our minds, we look after the interests of society, because family is the fundamental unit of society. When we do harm to the family, we cannot avoid doing harm to society. Decisions we make in this place, or any other place where we make decisions for all of society, must focus on children, and not just on children as individuals but on children as parts of families.

We live in a time when most men and boys are essentially fatherless. If men and boys are fatherless, so are the daughters. We live in a time when we lament violence against women, when we lament irresponsibility. Without fathers, we cannot teach our boys to treat women properly, and it is more difficult for daughters without their fathers to have a sense of who they are as well. Whatever the circumstances, when children do not have a father in the home, they find themselves on their own to figure out life, and they find out that it is a lonely place to be. They will often be ruled by their fears and anger and boredom, when lots of times all they seek is the affection of a father. There are many addictions that come from this fatherless place within them, a fundamental uncertainty in the core of their being.

● (1920)

In our art, our literature, our poems, our movies, our novels, there are so many written about children seeking out their parents, and in particular, their fathers. Lots of real life stories are about adopted children who at a certain age have an inner angst in their soul to find out who their parents are. They love their adopted parents and see them as their parents, but there is something inside of our souls that seeks to be connected with our fathers and our mothers.

The bill is in response to the fact that in today's current divorce law, it is fathers who are usually left out of the children's lives, and by extension, the children are left out of the fathers' lives.

What does fatherhood do? What does it teach people in general, kids in general? It is the new-found position as a requirement of the good life. It shows people how to fulfill duty. It binds us to other people in general. It binds us for real to a woman or to another adult. It is the only thing that still can do this.

Nowadays, marriage is instantly reversible and a negotiable contract, but fatherhood is not. Through this law, we will bring fathers closer to the hearts of the children and the children to the fathers.

The bill may not be perfect yet, but it is on the right track. We need to bring it to committee so we can examine it more closely. The concerns people have brought up about the bill can be addressed at committee. We cannot let it die at this point. We need to bring it to the next level. I encourage everyone in the House to vote in favour of the bill to bring it to committee.

● (1925)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would like to invite the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin for his five minute right of reply.

The hon. member.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some concluding comments for this second reading stage of debate on Bill C-560. I look forward to this, and I look forward to speaking again, hopefully, if the bill gets to committee and passes at that stage, amended or intact, and then back to the House. However, it has been an interesting process.

Over the past several months, I have heard from Canadians from coast to coast, from every province, from la belle province all the way across to western Canada and British Columbia. Over the course of the past years, I have heard from thousands of people.

I will confess from the get-go that the bill is not from my creative imagination per se. Certainly, I have carried the banner over the years, but there are some significant groups in the country that are involved in this.

I want to credit and thank Lawyers for Shared Parenting, a very distinguished group of lawyers that works in collaborative law and sees that all of these different things we have tried in the past, such as mediation and various other things, really have not got to the heart of the problems that of the flawed family law system.

I also want to thank the National Parents Organization, Preserving the Bond Between Parents and Children.

I want to thank Leading Women for Shared Parenting for the very considerable job it has done, and the number of its distinguished women across our country and the world grows every day.

Most of all, I want to thank the Canadian Equal Parenting Council, a very broad umbrella group comprised of 35 to 40 groups across the country that all have their own individual chapters. There is a sizeable number of people represented within these groups.

As well, I want to thank the many researchers with whom I have had the privilege to be in touch. They have weighed in on this, provided input and so on. Certainly, they will be prepared to come to committee. They are from Canada and abroad. A large consensus paper was recently written by a bunch of these individuals who have the intellectual heft on the social science kind of research that is being done.

This is coming at us in an avalanche. We are now beginning to better understand what the best interests of children are, adding already to those different criteria and parameters in the courts across the provinces.

Particularly, children want to love and be loved by both parents. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child talks about that very necessary thing.

Long-time supporters of the New Democratic Party, Liberals, Conservatives, Bloc Québécois and the Green Party, from every region across the country, have been calling their elected representatives to stand up for the best interest of Canada's children in a divorce by voting in favour of Bill C-560.

I want to make the point that, resoundingly, across party lines, across the entire country, a number of polls over the last years show support at 80% and upwards, or just hovering at about 79%, in all provinces by all parties represented in the House and by both genders. In fact, it is about 80% in support from men and about 1% or 2% more for women.

Members may ask why women even more than men are supportive of this equal shared parenting bill or this concept. It is because those men and women may marry again or have another partner. The issue of children having access to them consumes them and creates different dynamics in those relationships as well.

In fact, the current adversarial litigation system of settling child-related disputes is focused on parental rights. It is about winning the boat, the car, the house and the battle over the children. The present system is focused on the rights of the parents, whereas this bill is focused on the rights of the children. It would actually foster settlements, reduce the litigation and so on in the best interest of children.

We have had the discussion about the myth of the fifty-fifty. It is actually in the 35% to 50% range. We have talked about how this is not a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all solution. There are variations and arrangements that could be made. This is to drive it to the best interest of children so they have access to both mom and dad, aside from abuse or neglect.

I would encourage my colleagues to read some of the good material that has been sent to them. Read the bill itself, and not what the Canadian Bar Association is saying about the bill. Read the myths and fact document that has been circulated to members.

● (1930)

Please help me to get this to committee where it can be looked at for further amendments or adjustments, so we do the right thing in the best interests of children in the days ahead by way of passing the bill.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 a recorded division stands deferred until tomorrow, Wednesday, May 28, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise today to speak to the motion to extend the sitting hours of the House for the remainder of the spring session.

I would like to begin my remarks by saying that three years ago I was privileged to be elected by the wonderful residents of the great town of Richmond Hill as their member of Parliament. I made a commitment at that time to work hard on their behalf and represent their interests to the best of my ability. I promised to be diligent in my duties, to fulfill my responsibilities as their member of Parliament and to make Canada's laws by debating and voting on bills in an active, hard-working and orderly way. That commitment made three years ago remains my sole purpose each and every day as I enter this place.

I am sure my colleagues on both sides of the House also come here with that most noble of purpose. I have no doubt about that. It is this core responsibility that I will be directing the balance of my remarks toward, our obligation as legislators to make Canada's laws for the betterment of our constituents and, indeed, for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The job of a member of Parliament is an unusual one. There are no set defined hours. It is, indeed, definitely not a nine to five job, for the business of the country takes place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. Our obligations do not always wait for a time that is convenient because world events do not pause and families cannot put their most urgent affairs on hold. All of us are sent here by those in our respective ridings who have put their faith in each and every one of us to do the right thing at the right time. Sometimes the right thing is working extra hours, as we have been asked to do here today.

I cannot imagine any of us going back to our constituents and telling them that we are not prepared to put in extra time and that all the improvements to make our communities safer will have to wait, or telling businessmen, businesswomen and businesses in our ridings counting on tax relief so they can invest in innovation or new hires that they will have to put their expansion plans on hold for a while, or telling the handlers of police dogs that give 110% in protecting our homes and neighbourhoods that they will have to wait before we get around to protecting their faithful and most trusted companions.

I cannot imagine telling the residents of my riding, who are waiting to receive their citizenship, that I am sorry, but we just did not get around to making the changes to help them receive their Canadian citizenships faster, or telling Canadians who have been asking the government to better protect the value of Canadian citizenship that they will have to wait a bit longer until we are ready. I am not prepared to have these conversations back in my constituency this summer and I hope all of my colleagues in the chamber feel the same way.

I would like to provide a couple of examples of important legislation that I believe we will have an opportunity to address over the coming weeks before we recess for the summer. I want to elaborate on those a little.

As I mentioned, Canadians, including those with multi-generational roots in our great country and those who are new to our land, have been asking for a comprehensive reform of our Citizenship Act. The act has not changed in almost four decades, and we all know that the dynamic in Canada certainly has over those four decades.

This legislation would protect the value of Canadian citizenship for those who have it. In February of this year, we all heard from Canada's citizenship and immigration minister, who responded to the request for such legislation by introducing the strengthening Canadian citizenship act.

● (1935)

This legislation would create a faster and more efficient process for those applying to get it. Bill C-24, the strengthening Canadian citizenship act, proposes to streamline Canada's citizenship program by reducing the decision-making process from three steps to one. It is very important that we work extra hours to ensure that we are able to assist those who are in that queue by giving them their citizenship that they deserve, in as expedient manner as possible. If passed, and hopefully we will pass this legislation, it is expected that by 2015 and 2016 this change would bring the average processing time for citizenship applications down to under one year. It is also projected in the same timeframe to reduce the current backlog by more than 80%. When I see members sitting here every single day, I know that back in their constituencies, in our multicultural mosaic that we call Canada, this is an important issue that they hear about every single day.

Additionally, citizenship application fees would be better aligned with the actual cost of processing, thereby relieving the burden on Canadian taxpayers who currently subsidize the majority of the costs. That is only fair to the taxpayer and fair to all involved in the process.

More importantly, Bill C-24 would reinforce the value of Canadian citizenship. To ensure that citizenship applicants maintain strong ties to Canada, proposed changes to the act would provide a clear indication that the residence period to qualify for citizenship in fact requires a physical presence in Canada. It would also ensure that more applicants meet language requirements and are better prepared to fully participate in Canadian society, in their new country. As we have heard in our pre-study on the topic, language abilities allow for integration and better potential for success in Canadian society.

I am very proud that this legislation would finally act on lost Canadians who were born before 1947 by automatically extending citizenship to these individuals who obviously have strong ties to Canada.

Improving the integrity of Canada's citizenship process is one important element of the strengthening Canadian citizenship act and it is very important that we all work very hard and agree to work these extra hours so that we can provide some of the benefits as fast as possible back to Canadians and new Canadians.

The second important element is that it would shorten processing times. In fact, once enacted—

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I waited five minutes before doing so. It seems to me that, during that five-minute period, the member was talking about Bill C-24 even though the debate is on Motion No. 10. I would like to know if he will get to the topic at hand, which is Motion No. 10, not Bill C-24.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I appreciate the hon. member for Sherbrooke's intervention. It is not unusual for the question before the House to contain several subjects. In this case, Motion No. 10 affects many different bills. It is difficult to separate the two subjects.

[*English*]

Therefore, in this case, I would say that with respect to a bill that has been proposed as the necessity for the extended hours, it is difficult to make arguments on either side of that question without in fact reflecting on the subject of those bills.

I appreciate the point of order, but I think the hon. member is in relevant territory, provided he continues to reference the subject that is the question of Motion No. 10.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague that my intention here tonight is to give a very good explanation, as best as I can, to all colleagues in the chamber as to why I think it is important to put in these extra hours over the next few weeks.

There are a number of pieces of legislation that need to be looked at, and we will have an opportunity to look at them, properly debate them and, hopefully, pass them through the House. This way, we can get back to our constituents with a record of having done something for them, given the opportunity that we can do that by working additional hours.

I am referencing a couple of pieces of legislation today because I would like to impart to my hon. colleague opposite and all colleagues in the House the reasons for which I am convinced of the need to work the additional hours so that we can pass this legislation through. I am quite satisfied to work the additional hours. I appreciate your ruling on that matter.

I was speaking about Bill C-24. In fact, once enacted, the changes outlined in that particular act would mean that processing times will be shortened to less than one year. For example, with absolutely no changes and with no economic action plan funding, processing times would escalate to an unacceptable 35 months within two years. I am sure that the hon. member who made the intervention, and all members of the House, do not want to deal with this issue with their constituents, knowing that they could have done something about it and did not in an expeditious manner. It is important that we enact this legislation now, or as soon as possible, so that Canada's citizenship backlog can be eliminated by 2015-16, allowing for just-in-time processing of applications.

It would also provide a way to recognize the important contributions of those who served Canada in uniform. Once passed, Bill C-24 would allow permanent residents who are members of the Canadian Armed Forces to have quicker access to Canadian citizenship. Many residents in my riding were unaware of the current rules regarding obtaining Canadian citizenship. When I explained it to them, they wanted to know why we had not done it sooner. They want it done very quickly, and I do not want to go back there, knowing that I had an opportunity to stand up in the House and represent them, and say, “We decided that, as parliamentarians, we do not want to work the additional hours from now until the end of the session to provide those things that I had been asked for and continue to be asked for”. That is why I am speaking to the specific advantages of getting this work done as quickly as possible and processed through the House.

Residents in Richmond Hill were surprised to learn that under the current rules, there is no requirement to be physically present in Canada while obtaining citizenship, and that residency alone for three out of four years was enough. They support imposing a minimum requirement of 183 days of physical presence in Canada. They support being here for four out of the last six years. In fact, we heard witnesses testify in committee, without getting into the specifics of the bill, that they believe that four out of six years is actually not enough. Some of them thought that.

Our peer countries have stricter and longer residency requirements in order to be eligible for citizenship. We must strengthen the value of our citizenship in order to compete on the world stage. We have the opportunity to do that within the next couple of weeks if we put in these extra hours. I hope that all members of the House will support it.

Many of my constituents were also surprised to learn that under existing rules, there is no requirement to file an income tax return to be eligible for a grant of citizenship. They agree with the proposed changes in the new act that would require applicants to file Canadian income taxes to be eligible for citizenship. Again, all Canadians have to complete their income tax return on an annual basis. It should be a no-brainer for anyone seeking to have the same privileges as all Canadians to have the requirement to do that as well. Canadians want that passed as soon as possible through the House.

We know that knowledge of one of Canada's official languages is a key determinant in the successful integration of new Canadians. There are changes in the new legislation that would give stronger language tools to prospective new Canadians. We believe that this would help with their integration into the country and provide more potential for successful outcomes.

I see that I have five minutes left. I will move on.

● (1945)

As of October 2013, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was investigating several large-scale cases of residence fraud involving more than 3,000 Canadian citizens and 5,000 permanent residents. There were also reports that nearly 2,000 individuals linked to these investigations have withdrawn their citizenship applications. We can see there is a litany of reasons why we need to put in legislation that will strengthen Canadian citizenship. Then we will be able to go back to our constituents, hopefully after the spring session, and say we did something about all of those things that they talk to us about every single day.

There are many other pieces of important legislation that I can speak about today, but there is one in particular that is of personal interest to me that was recently introduced in the House called the justice for animals in service act, more popularly known as Quanto's law.

This legislation would ensure that those who harm law enforcement, service, and Canadian Armed Forces animals, face serious consequences for their actions. It recognizes the special role that these animals play in protecting our communities and improving the quality of life for Canadians.

This legislation honours Quanto, a police dog who was stabbed to death while helping to apprehend a fleeing suspect in Edmonton, Alberta, in October of last year. It also pays tribute to other animals that have lost their lives in the line of duty such as Toronto Police Service horse Brigadier.

This is legislation the police services across the country have been asking for for many years. That piece of legislation is before the House. The minister has already introduced it. How nice would it be for all of us to go back to our ridings, meet with the police chiefs, meet police officers, meet officers working with horse and canine units and tell them that finally we did something? We worked extra hours to make sure that we were able to deliver to our police services who use police animals as tools to keep our communities safer. We did something about it.

That will go a long way, not only for members of the governing party, but for all members from every party in the House. We are doing something that is correct. It is the right thing to do. It is responding to our first responders. The police services have been asking for this many years.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking that you let me know when I have a minute left so I can conclude my comments—

Some hon. members: Time's up.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I see that my colleagues from the Liberal Party opposite in their usual heckling way are trying to throw me off and I appreciate their enthusiasm, but there are a couple more things I want to say.

I have a number of letters that I have received from constituents across the country from different ridings attesting to their support for legislation such as Quanto's law. I want to take this opportunity to read just a couple of them because I am running out of time. A resident in Thunder Bay writes:

> Please continue to push for the amendment to Criminal Code that says, anyone who knowingly or recklessly poisons, injures or kills a law enforcement animal, including a horse or dog, could be subject to the same five-year maximum sentence.

Another resident in Nova Scotia writes:

> I am a parole officer at a community correctional centre in which we employ awesome drug detector dogs that come in and find contraband including drugs and weapons. It is not morally or ethically right that offenders could attempt to poison nor injure these law enforcement service animals and it be treated as a property offence.

As I wind down, let me say that I think every member in the House wants to be able to go back to their riding at the end of this session and say, "I, as your member of Parliament, worked those extra hours to ensure that we pass this important piece of legislation that means a lot to you, my constituents, my neighbours. I did the best I possibly could as your representative in the Parliament of Canada."

● (1950)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that impassioned speech just proves to everyone what a great member of Parliament the member for Richmond Hill is and how passionately he feels about all this legislation before the House. He made a very good case for the strengthening Canadian citizenship act, showing why that is so important for the people of Canada and why we need to get that measure passed soon.

The member also mentioned Quanto's law, the justice for animals in service act that he was instrumental in bringing forward, and we all need to commend him for that.

I wonder if the member could tell us about some of the other important criminal justice legislation that is before this House today, such as Bill C-26, the tougher penalties for child predators act, and Bill C-32, the victims bill of rights act, which we hope to debate later this evening.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, for his kind words and for his hard work. He is a tireless person and a tireless representative for his constituents in this Parliament, particularly on matters of justice.

Regarding tougher penalties for child predators, is there a member of Parliament or any human being in this country who would not want to have tougher penalties on child predators, those who would prey on the most vulnerable in our society, our children? We have an opportunity to pass a piece of legislation that would protect our children in their schools, in the play yard, in the community centre where they play a sport, in the park where they are on a swing. We can protect our children. How can we possibly say to our constituents that we have this bill called "tougher penalties for child predators act", but we decided we did not want to work the extra hours between now and June and that for whatever reason, we got to this point and we were not able to pass it? We have an opportunity to stand up and do the right thing here.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must compliment my colleague from Richmond Hill on his excellent speech and, as was previously mentioned, for putting some passion to the issue, because passion is what we should be about in the House—passion, hard work, reason, and moving the yardsticks forward in whatever it is we are trying to do.

I want to talk a bit about Quanto's law, and I know my colleague had a lot to do with that.

Today the Minister of Veterans Affairs announced a half-million-dollar pilot program for getting companion dogs to veterans who are suffering from operational stress injury. That is a tremendously important thing. We have about 100 veterans now who have dogs. This will bring another 50 dogs to veterans. It is about animals, but it is also about Quanto's law with service dogs and other service animals that our police forces and other people rely on to help them in their work.

I wonder if my colleague can stress the importance of that issue, and the importance of staying here and getting these kinds of bills passed.

● (1955)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member has certainly done a lot of work as a veteran himself. I know he has served in the Canadian Armed Forces and I know how close he is to our first responders and I know how important it is to him as an Edmontonian that something is being done in the name of Quanto, a dog that was actually killed while in the line of duty in the hon. member's hometown of Edmonton.

A lot of people do not realize that in some cases it costs upwards of $75,000 to train one of these animals, and they have no choice when they are taken in as puppies to be trained. We have an opportunity to let our police officers know that the companion they trust their lives with will be looked after.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted to hear such an impassioned speech from my colleague about wanting to debate government bills and also to represent Richmond Hill and the constituents who live there.

However, when I look at the history of what has happened since we came back in the summer, since October, and we look at all the closure motions we have seen, we see that my colleague has actually only spoken to five government bills since the beginning of October, so this cry now that we need all this time to speak actually makes me a bit skeptical.

As I speak on a wide range of issues because they are so important in my riding, my question for my colleague is this. On this particular issue, if we sit until midnight, which I do not object to, how does the government's limiting the role of the opposition help MPs represent their constituencies?

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I was particularly amused that the member had done a little research to find out how many different bills I have spoken to in the House since we came back in October.

I am proud to say that I have spoken on those five and on many other issues, as well as in committee. However, the member opposite should know that I will put my record for the hours that I put in for my constituents, both in this place and back in my constituency, up against hers or that of any other member in this House.

The people of Richmond Hill know that their member of Parliament works 24/7 for them, all of the time. Why do I think we need to impose closure on occasion? It is because of hearing regurgitated speeches saying exactly the same thing over and over again ad nauseam. I submit to the hon. member—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary is speaking at the top of his voice, but it is very difficult for members at this end of the chamber to hear him. There is a lot of noise in the chamber, and I would ask hon. members to keep their comments down.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, actually I thank the members of the Liberal Party for their support. They are being quite supportive over here today.

What I do want to say to the member who asked the question is that to speak ad nauseam with repetitive speeches one after another after another serves no purpose. That is not why Canadians brought us here.

I will close by saying this. It is something that Aristotle said:

> Political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of mere companionship.

We are not here to hear everybody say the exact same thing over and over so that they can get volume for the YouTube channel or measure the words or the number of times somebody gets up in the House, as the member stood up to do. We are here to act.

● (2000)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 8:00 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of government business No. 10 now before the House.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the amendment. will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

● (2050)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 146)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boutin-Sweet
Cash
Chisholm
Cleary
Côté
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dusseault
Freeman
Genest
Godin
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Larose
Leslie
Mai
Martin
Mathyssen
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nunez-Melo
Péclet
Quach
Ravignat
Rousseau
Sandhu
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stoffer
Toone
Turmel– — 81

Angus
Atamanenko
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Brosseau
Chicoine
Choquette
Comartin
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Donnelly
Dubé
Fortin
Garrison
Giguère
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hyer
Julian
Lapointe
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Marston
Masse
May
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nicholls
Papillon
Pilon
Rafferty
Raynault
Saganash
Sellah
Sitsabaiesan
Sullivan
Tremblay

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Anders
Andrews
Ashfield
Baird
Bélanger
Benoit
Blaney
Boughen
Brison
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Easter
Falk
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fry
Gallant
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
Jones
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lebel
Leef
Lemieux
Lobb

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bennett
Bergen
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Dubourg
Dykstra
Eyking
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Galipeau
Garneau
Glover
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leitch
Leung
Lukiwski

Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Maguire
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
Paradis
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Richards
Saxton
Schellenberger
Sgro
Shipley
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Smith
Sopuck
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Trost
Trudeau
Uppal
Valeriote
Van Loan
Wallace
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer– — 175

MacAulay
MacKenzie
Mayes
McGuinty
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
Obhrai
Oliver
O'Toole
Payne
Preston
Rajotte
Regan
Rempel
Ritz
Scarpaleggia
Seeback
Shea
Shory

Sorenson
St-Denis
Strahl
Tilson
Trottier
Truppe
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to

Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (2055)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 147)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht

Alexander
Allison
Anders
Andrews
Ashfield
Baird
Bélanger
Benoit
Blaney
Boughen
Brison
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Easter
Falk
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fry
Gallant
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
Jones
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lebel
Leef
Lemieux
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Maguire
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
Paradis
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Richards
Saxton
Schellenberger
Sgro
Shipley
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Smith
Sopuck
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Trost
Trudeau
Uppal
Valeriote
Van Loan
Wallace
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson

Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bennett
Bergen
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Dubourg
Dykstra
Eyking
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Galipeau
Garneau
Glover
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leitch
Leung
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Mayes
McGuinty
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
Obhrai
Oliver
O'Toole
Payne
Preston
Rajotte
Regan
Rempel
Ritz
Scarpaleggia
Seeback
Shea
Shory

Sorenson
St-Denis
Strahl
Tilson
Trottier
Truppe
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to

Wilks
Wong

Woodworth
Young (Vancouver South)
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer– — 174

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boutin-Sweet
Cash
Chisholm
Cleary
Côté
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dusseault
Freeman
Genest
Godin
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Larose
Leslie
Mai
Martin
Mathyssen
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nunez-Melo
Péclet
Quach
Ravignat
Rousseau
Sandhu
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stoffer
Toone
Turmel– — 81
Angus
Atamanenko
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Brosseau
Chicoine
Choquette
Comartin
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Donnelly
Dubé
Fortin
Garrison
Giguère
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hyer
Julian
Lapointe
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Marston
Masse
May
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nicholls
Papillon
Pilon
Rafferty
Raynault
Saganash
Sellah
Sitsabaiesan
Sullivan
Tremblay

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The hon. member for Peterborough is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I was standing to vote in support of this government motion, but I do not believe that my vote was counted. I would like to be registered as supporting the government.

The Speaker: I do not think the member was standing at the time that the yeas were being called. Is there unanimous consent to allow the member's vote to be counted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that I saw the member standing during the counting of the yea votes.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I would just further add to this that the hon. member for Peterborough stood at the same time as he did in the previous motion on the amendment, where he was counted in the same sequence, before the counting turned to the Liberal Party. Therefore, he had every reason to assume that, having stood at the same time, he would have been counted in the same fashion in support of this motion.

● (2100)

The Speaker: It is working so well in other venues that what I will do is check the tapes. I have to say that at the time I saw it, I did not see the member standing; but if members say that he was standing, we can certainly examine the tapes and, if he was, we can adjust accordingly, but I did not see it at the time. I will come back to the House with that.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is rising on a point of order.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I know you have made your ruling that you will look at the tapes. However, I know the tapes often do not reveal everything that was seen. I know the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert saw the hon. member for Peterborough standing.

In the balance of convenience in this matter, the recording of his vote matters to no one as much as it matters to the member. His constituents know when he is present in the House, as any of us are; our attendance is only registered in whether we have voted or not. It makes no material difference to how the vote was counted. I voted opposite to the member for Peterborough.

It is a matter of member's privilege to be counted for standing for his or her constituents. Every vote should count when a member stands as promptly as the member for Peterborough did.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, it is standard practice in this House to take members at their word, in fact, that they are being honest when they are speaking in this House. When I stood in the House and indicated that I had, in fact, stood to vote and to be counted in the same fashion that I had previously, I was being honest.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, you are going to have to make a decision. Are you going to go by what a member says? I hope we are all treated the same.

The Speaker: I think I have heard enough on this point, and I will come back to the House in due course.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VICTIMS BILL OF RIGHTS ACT

The House resumed from April 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-32, An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will start with a quote:

> A charter of the rights of victims will finally see the day in Canada. As an organization that has been advocating for the rights of families and their missing children since 1985, we salute our government's efforts. The voices of our families have been heard...victims will now be at the centre of the judiciary system in our country.

Those are the words of Pina Arcamone, Director General of the Missing Children's Network. This organization assists families who are dealing with the disappearance of a loved one, which does happen. They can turn to this organization for support.

I have another quote:

> The Harper government has kept its promise to victims. Since coming to power, the Harper government has promised to help the victims of crime. Today, we can say that that mission has been accomplished thanks to the introduction of the victims bill of rights act. It is a first in Canadian history....We welcome this new bill and actively support it.

Alain Fortier, the co-founder of Victimes d'agressions sexuelles au masculin, or VASAM, is the person who said that. I had the privilege of meeting him just a few weeks ago, in the days following the introduction in the House of the Canadian victims bill of rights and the bill to bring it into force by my colleague, the Minister of Justice.

Maybe some members will be watching the hockey game tonight instead. That reminds me that when I was born, it was right in the middle of the Canadiens' final. The gynecologist who was attending my mother during her delivery was a little distracted. I can understand that tonight, some people are watching the Canadiens' game. I started my speech between the first and second periods, so I would like to add my voice to a lot of people in Quebec and Canada who hope the Canadiens will win tonight.

While our glorious Habs defend the Montreal Canadiens' honour on the ice, I want to say that I am glad to be here tonight and that I feel privileged to add my voice to the voices of Pina Arcamone, the director general of the Missing Children's Network in Quebec, and Mr. Fortier, in supporting our government's initiative, the Canadian victims bill of rights.

Since 2006, our government has been committed to putting victims at the centre of our judicial system. The Minister of Justice introduced the bill. I was there with him, along with the Prime Minister and his wife and victims of crime like Sheldon Kennedy. This former hockey player played in the National Hockey League and was a victim of sexual assault while he was in the minor leagues, and he suffered the after-effects.

However, he decided to transform that pain into a constructive force. He was by our side to support the efforts by the government and by Canadian society to encourage victims to speak out and transform their painful experiences into sources of inspiration for other victims, to help them. Today, in fact, Sheldon Kennedy is the founder of a centre that helps other people who have been victims of assault.

This charter contains four important principles whose aim is to ensure that the fundamental rights of victims are recognized: the right to information, which has too often been ignored; the right to participate in the various stages of the judicial process; the right to protection; and the right to restitution.

● (2105)

My colleague, the Minister of Justice, manages the judicial process, and as Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, I have the privilege of ensuring that the other aspects of our legal, judicial and policing systems are taken into account in the Canadian victims bill of rights. That is what I would like to talk about this evening.

For example, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police works on crime scenes after a crime is committed. Correctional Service Canada ensures that offenders serve their sentences. Then there is the Parole Board of Canada. I often say that these entities are the arms and hands of justice.

It is important to ensure that victims are taken into account from the time the crime occurs to the moment the legal process is set in motion and the accused is found guilty, serves his sentence and is then freed.

A number of my colleagues have introduced private member's bills to ensure that our system works harder.

Our government has put laws in place, and the Canadian victims bill of rights solidifies and confirms this important change. The bill gives victims the opportunity to take ownership of the bill of rights and write the new law. The new Canadian law will take victims' rights into consideration. That is why this bill is worthwhile, and I hope to have the support of all members of the House.

I think that this bill transcends party lines, since it not only includes fundamental principles, but it also gives victims tools and practical measures.

Extensive consultations were held across the country to develop the Canadian victims bill of rights. I had the opportunity to participate in consultations in Montreal and Quebec City. Victims spoke up and told us what they wanted to see in the bill. This followed up on the commitment we made in the throne speech and that we mentioned in many of our communications with the public.

Who are these victims?

● (2110)

[*English*]

Floyd Wiebe's son, T.J., was murdered in 2003. He has had to deal with the challenge of trying to find out more information about the situation around his son's killer. He said that all victims want is honesty, information, and to be treated with respect.

Well, it is about time for this country to deliver on the expectation of those victims to have access to information and to be treated with respect.

[*Translation*]

When I went back to Quebec City the day after introducing the Canadian victims bill of rights, I had an opportunity to meet victims, including one whom most people would be unlikely to think of as a victim: a law enforcement officer. She was a police officer who, in the course of fulfilling her duties as a first responder, was stabbed in the face. She was severely injured. Her attacker was later granted parole and transferred to a halfway house just a few blocks away from where the victim lived. That is the kind of thing we want to put an end to. Victims need to feel protected, not just while the offender is serving time, but also once he has served his sentence and is back in society. That is why we need the Canadian victims bill of rights.

The government took the consultations very seriously. We worked hard to draft a bill that will enable victims to get the resources and information they need when they need it.

That is why we consider this bill to be historic. It is a milestone. The scope of the bill is quasi-constitutional: the Canadian victims bill of rights. The purpose of this bill of rights is to ensure transparency for victims, to ensure that they are fully aware of their rights in relation to the criminal justice system and correctional services.

Once a crime has been committed, it is important for police authorities to inform victims of their rights. This is the mechanism for that. Of course, our police officers have to catch criminals and conduct investigations, but they also have to take victims into consideration. A victim is anyone who has been subjected to physical, emotional or financial harm.

Victims must be taken into account when such actions are reported and police investigations begin, as well as at sentencing, during reviews throughout the offender's incarceration and upon release.

[*English*]

As I mentioned, public safety agencies have an important role to play throughout this process. Therefore, we are proposing changes to how they undertake their work with victims.

Yes, victims want to have better access to the justice system, to be able to choose the information they want to have and to decide at which points they want to interact with the system.

Those four pillars are critical.

The first one is the right to information on demand, such as the status of investigations and criminal proceedings and their outcomes. They would also have a right, on demand, to information about the conditional release of the offender.

Second, victims would have the right to protection. This would include their physical security, protecting them from intimidation and retaliation, as well as ensuring that their privacy would be considered.

Third, victims would have the right to participation. This means ensuring that victims of crime have a voice at the heart of the justice system and can convey how they personally have been impacted by crimes.

Fourth, they would have the right to restitution. By this, we mean that the court would have to consider making a restitution order and if that order were not paid, victims would the right to have that order enforced as a civil debt.

● (2115)

[*Translation*]

Consequently, incorporating these rights into the bill will change the way many organizations do their job. This is what is referred to as part 2 of the bill, under Public Safety. This will not only apply to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but also to Correctional Service Canada, the Parole Board of Canada, and the Canada Border Services Agency.

As far as the RCMP is concerned, under this bill, victims of crime will have the right to obtain information on the progress of a criminal investigation, from the time when the crime is reported or at the start of the investigation. Victims will not be left in the dark, which was the case for Senator Boisvenu, to whom I wish to pay tribute this evening.

For Senator Boisvenu, this bill is the culmination of what motivated him to enter politics. I consider myself highly privileged, as a member of Parliament from Quebec, to be able to benefit from the expertise, commitment and the passion of Senator Boisvenu in recognizing the rights of victims within our judicial system. He was of course in Toronto, participated in the consultations, and was also in Quebec City with Officer Sandra Dion celebrating the introduction of the bill on the Canadian victims bill of rights.

[*English*]

If I go back to the RCMP, the RCMP already provides information to victims, as well as referrals to victims' services. It is important for victims to know there are those great organizations and services provided, often by provinces, to help and support victims. The RCMP also takes into account a victim's need for protection throughout the investigative and judicial process.

[*Translation*]

The police and other investigators are usually the first point of contact for victims of crime. By enshrining in law the rights of victims to information, we are acknowledging that police have an important role to play and recognizing just how crucial it is to provide victims with as much information as possible over the course of a criminal investigation.

[*English*]

Under the Canadian victims bill of rights, Canada Border Services Agency investigators would also be affected because they would be responsible for respecting a victim's right to information and to participate in the criminal justice process. For example, the agency would be required to provide victims with updates about the status of criminal investigations related to immigration fraud.

Further, the CBSA would commit to expeditiously sharing information with the Correctional Service of Canada to ensure that registered victims of the federal offenders would be informed when an offender has been removed from Canada, subject to any privacy concerns.

● (2120)

[*Translation*]

These are major changes affecting the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canada Border Services Agency.

Now let us look at what happens when a victim is involved when the offender is granted parole. The Canadian victims bill of rights states that a victim is entitled, upon request, to information on an offender who caused them harm. That is one of the four pillars of the bill. This right extends to information on the offender’s parole, for example, if the offender is indeed eligible.

Correctional Service Canada is already in the process of developing tools to provide victims with access to this information and, of course, to enable them to take advantage of modern technology, while respecting standards of confidentiality and privacy, and creating an appropriate environment for victims to access information.

However, this right does not extend to all the information available on the offender. For example, a victim would not have the right to access information of a highly personal nature, such as medical and psychological files, and associated reports. This information would specifically be excluded for reasons of privacy.

[*English*]

While registered victims will not be able to access information that does not pertain to the offence, the Canadian victims bill of rights would provide a registered victim with the right to access information that would be important to them, such as information about the offender's release into the community.

[*Translation*]

When and where will the inmate be returned to the community? Also, are there conditions imposed on him when he is released? That is fundamental information that victims will have access to through a data bank and special access.

[*English*]

We know that the information most frequently requested from either the Correctional Service of Canada or the Parole Board of Canada is related to the offender's release date, destination and conditions of release.

[*Translation*]

That information will be available.

Victims also want to know whether the offender has made progress toward social reintegration during his sentence. They want to know whether the offender is taking measures to address the factors that led to his criminal behaviour. Victims will also have access to this information because we are amending the Corrections and Conditional Release Act precisely in order to allow victims to get more updates on offenders' progress.

I have to say that this is a far cry from the Liberal era, when a former solicitor general even said that we must put the rights of criminals before the rights of victims. That is totally unacceptable in a society where the cost of crime is so high. It is time for us to work together to correct this situation and pass the Canadian victims bill of rights to ensure that our country puts victims at the heart of our justice system again.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his presentation. It is very interesting, and it is clear that the bill deserves our attention. We must improve the situation for victims in Canada. If the government's initiative is serious, then we will be able to improve things for them.

However, the Conservatives themselves said that justice is expensive. Access to justice is also very expensive for victims. There is not a single penny that comes with the charter being presented today. How are less fortunate victims going to access all these fine programs? They are going to have a tough time.

For those who have money, so much the better. I have no doubt that those victims will benefit from this initiative. However, less fortunate victims are not just victims of crime. They are victims of the fact that they are less fortunate. How are they going to have access to justice? What is there in this bill to help them?

I would like to hear what the minister has to say about that.

● (2125)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine for his question and his interest in the bill. I would like to respond with three elements and give him a concrete example that I forgot to mention in my speech.

When the offender is released, the victim, as I mentioned, will have access to three pieces of information: the offender's release date, destination and conditions of release.

There is one other very important element, and that is the fact that the victim will have access to a photo of the offender via a secure portal. We were told that those elements are important to victims.

As for the cost, we must not forget that Quebec and other provinces have made numerous programs available. There are also many organizations that help victims. Of course, we are adding a financial component with the principle of restitution.

We also have to understand—and this is often forgotten in our justice system—that the cost of crime is estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars. That is important. In putting victims at the heart of the justice system again, we are taking those costs into consideration.

That is why we always need to remember that our justice system must also protect victims from criminals.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the minister has said. One of the concerns I have had in relation to victims is whether the government is doing enough to prevent victims in the first place. When I have the opportunity to have discussions with many of my constituents, they want the government to be more aggressive at coming up with proactive programming, encouraging activities that would lead to fewer victims. I think all Canadians want that.

For me, this is an opportunity to get onto the record an important issue. I believe the government could be doing more. The minister might want to respond, specifically, to the importance of preventing victims in the first place. I realize it is not necessarily overly relevant to the bill, but it is an important aspect. I would be interested in his comments on that.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, reducing crime at the source pertains to the debate tonight. That is why this government has been so keen on making our streets and communities safer by strengthening our laws. We wish we could have benefited from the support of the opposition member, but unfortunately, that has not materialized.

Numbers show that in this country, the crime rate is steadily declining. This is reassuring for Canadians.

With respect to recidivism, those serious criminals who commit repeated offences need to stay behind bars. That is why we have introduced minimum sentences for those specific offences. They are only a tiny portion of crimes. Minimum sentences are important so that honest people are not bothered by criminals.

There is another point I would like to raise. We have a broad national crime prevention strategy. We are working to prevent youth from getting involved with youth gangs. We are also planning to move forward on a strategy to tackle organized crime. This is a challenge.

One dollar invested in prevention and fighting crime is billions of dollars saved. Not only is money saved, but lives are not broken by criminals.

● (2130)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the minister would be so kind, I would like him to go back to Senator Boisvenu, who before he became a senator was on the streets of Montreal speaking against human traffickers in Quebec. In his life, he turned a great tragedy into a great triumph. The victims bill of rights is important, and Senator Boisvenu had some input into it.

Could the minister please comment on the senator's input on this particular bill of rights?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, one of the great things about being in politics and being on this journey is being able to meet exceptional people. I was certainly privileged to meet with Senator Boisvenu.

I also want to pay tribute to a member of the House who is so committed to fighting human trafficking, which is the worst form of crime in this country. It is modern slavery. I am speaking of the member for Kildonan—St. Paul. She is the one who brought this to reality.

[*Translation*]

It was the member for Kildonan—St. Paul who made me realize that human trafficking is a reality. It definitely existed in Canada in the 2000s, just as it did in 2010 and it does in 2014.

In fact, Senator Boisvenu, Justice Andrée Ruffo and I marched together in the streets of Montreal to ensure that predators—those who prey especially on minors and often lead them into prostitution, drugs and exploitation—are brought before the courts and subject to minimum sentences.

In that regard, I believe that the member has done much more than is required of an elected official, because she has championed this cause. It is inspiring for all parliamentarians. Her work is very relevant to the victims bill of rights, as is that of Senator Boisvenu. As we know, he was struck by tragedy: a repeat offender killed his daughter.

Senator Boisvenu has worked to ensure that other Canadians do not go through the same trauma. That is why he is campaigning very methodically and rigorously for the recognition of victims' rights. I am thinking, for example, of the Association of Families of Persons Assassinated or Disappeared.

Once again, I would like to acknowledge the remarkable work of the member for Kildonan—St. Paul. I encourage her to continue her work because Canada needs women like her to support the most vulnerable people in our society, including victims of sexual assault.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be speaking in favour of the bill before us, Bill C-32, an act to enact the Canadian victims bill of rights and to amend certain acts. I am supporting it at second reading, because I see some real potential here, and I am hoping that when it gets to committee, it will get the kind of work it requires so we can really address the area of victims' rights. We want to support victims of indictable offences in a real way. We also want to make sure that this charter is not simply a statement of principle that will never be implemented and will just gather dust on some shelf.

This bill outlines the federal right of victims of crime to be informed, to be protected, to participate, and to receive compensation under the Canadian victims bill of rights, and it proposes modifications to the Criminal Code, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, and the Canada Evidence Act to incorporate these rights.

I think this is really important for us to pay attention to. Bill C-32 establishes no legal obligation on those working in the criminal justice system to implement these rights. One thing I have learned over the years is that to have rights on paper does not guarantee too much, because what we need to go along with the rights given to us in legislation are also the tools so that those rights can be implemented and we can benefit from what legislators pass.

We often hear, and I have heard this a number of times, that my colleagues across the aisle truly want to make victims a priority, despite the fact that it took them eight years and many photo ops and press releases to get to the point where they put pen to paper and tabled something before this House. We have to spend some time looking at why it has taken this government that long a time to bring forward this bill, when it has talked about it for such a long time.

It is no secret in this House that the NDP has always supported the rights of victims. We will continue to consult with victims groups and experts to determine how we can best assist them. On this side of the House, we have no allergy to expert opinion, to data, to research, or to listening to the health professionals who work with victims. They know a lot about this.

As members know, I have been a teacher most of my life, and in that role, I was also a counsellor in a school. I often dealt with young adults who were victims of crime and with their families as well. I became aware of the deplorable lack of services that exist to support victims, so this has been a topic that has been close and dear to my heart for a number of years. I am glad to see that the government will be moving on it.

One of the things I also became aware of when I was a high school counsellor is how few resources there are out there. I do not know if members are aware of this, but the federal government has often relied on the provinces to provide some of these resources and services to support victims. However, the provinces are feeling stretched to the limit. We are hearing from them that the downloading of the refugee health care costs is putting a huge burden on the provinces. We have heard that from the premiers, from citizen groups, and from the medical profession as well. That is one example of being penny wise and pound foolish.

● (2135)

There have been other things, as we know, such as health care costs and all kinds of responsibilities. Under this government, the costs have been downloaded to the provinces to carry out. They only have so many resources.

I was reminded today of something that happened in B.C. In the beautiful province of British Columbia, we actually have a Liberal-Conservative coalition government. They call themselves Liberals, but even my colleagues across the way would admit that they are just as conservative as those sitting across the way. That government has cut the victims' criminal injuries fund. That is the fund that would be used to support and provide services to victims. I am hearing that because of financial pressures, some provinces, such as Newfoundland and Labrador,have eliminated that fund altogether.

I worry that we are setting expectations very high and are not going to be able to deliver those services, because there seems to be very little attached to this piece of legislation that would actually lead to any kind of implementation resources. Without those resources, all we are left with, and this I think we can agree on, are principles in proposed bills and charters. How will those play out? What kind of support will be available to the victims?

We have discovered this over and over again when we have seen legislation brought forward and we have thought that at last the government is going to address this issue. It is going to fix this. However, what I have discovered at various committee meetings is that it is not that easy, because with this government, the devil is always in the details. In this bill, it is the lack of details and resources that really hit us.

It is because of that that we are supporting this bill at second reading. We want to see what we can flesh out at committee stage. There is no way the government across the way is going to get a blank cheque on this issue without actually putting some resources on the table.

We will study the bill. We are not allergic to experts. We are going to invite experts. My colleagues across the way will invite experts, and we will listen to their opinions. We will read the data they have, and we will listen to the victims. Based on that, we will make sure that we put forward amendments so that the bill will really respond to victims' needs.

One of the things that struck me even before I decided to run as a member of Parliament was that we have had a government for a number of years that has been making all kinds of promises and often portrays itself as a law and order government. More recently, in the throne speech, it promised this bill. This has been in its platform since 2006. We are glad it is here now, but let us really take a look at what it means.

When I hear the term, "a government of law and order", I really have to shake my head. I heard the minister speak earlier, and I was thinking that there were commitments made in the last election to put additional police out on the streets. In my beautiful province of British Columbia, in my riding of Newton—North Delta, in Surrey and North Delta, my constituents tell me over and over again that they are feeling betrayed because the government did not deliver the additional policing it promised.

However, I am the first one to say that policing is not the only answer. We have to look at many other ways of tackling crime in our neighbourhoods.

● (2140)

I have regular coffee shop meetings with my constituents, and because of a horrific murder in my riding, the 26th in a year, the community galvanized. There have been many meetings, and at every meeting my constituents tell me that they do not feel very safe and they are very worried. Seniors tell me that all the time.

I heard the minister on how we can save millions or billions of dollars with preventative programs. I would say that here is an example of where we are failing to put more police on the streets and look at prevention programs.

It is interesting that the minister strongly supports prevention, but when I talk to the huge range of different service providers in my riding,I find that their program support services are being cut dramatically, some by 100%. A lot of the services that used to be available to help youth reintegrate into society, lead a positive lifestyle, and enter into meaningful employment have not been funded or have been cut.

When I look at the mental health services that are available, I do not actually see any investment, even though we all stand in this House and talk about the great cost of mental health issues across our communities to our health services, our social services, and our penal system. We are all aware of that. Once again, where are the resources to help those who suffer from mental illness? Where are the resources, in a serious way, for those who are dealing with addictions, so that we can help them once again lead a more successful life? I have heard a lot about this.

I have a lot of respect for my colleague across the way, who has done a lot of work on human trafficking. I think everyone in this House would agree that it is a heinous crime and something we need to tackle in a serious way in the international community, because it is an international problem and we need to play our part.

Today we are talking about victims. What is it that victims need? Victims have been telling us that they need access to services and they need support. Many of them also want access to parole hearings and to be informed about the status of prosecution. They just want to know where the case is at.

A mother whose child died very tragically would check in with me regularly, asking if so-and-so was about to come up for parole. Every time parole came up, that mom went through all the pain and agony as if it had happened just that day.

We do not need to provide patronizing words. We need to provide real support and real processes that are going to work. It is not just for the sake of politically saying that we have this bill and we have done our piece, because until we provide the resources and put mechanisms in place to implement the bill, it is just words. I really do not want victims to feel further victimized because they feel that we played some kind of game with them.

I will read some quotes.

This is what Steve Sullivan, the first victims ombudsman, had to say about the bill on the CBC news on April 3, 2014. What he said rings alarm bells for me and makes me look at the bill more closely.

● (2145)

The former victims ombudsman charged Thursday that the Minister of Justice has over-promised and under-delivered on the Conservative government's victims bill of rights.

Those are not easy words for anyone to say, but I can see why he would have said that when he saw that there were no resources attached to this bill.

Also, there is Lori Triano-Antidormi, a mother of a murdered child. I cannot imagine the pain that this mom has gone through. She said this to CBC news on April 3, 2014, just last month. She stated that not everyone believes the bill will be effective. She went on to say that the bill will create false hope for victims.

We have to remember that Lori Triano-Antidormi is not only a victim of crime, but she is also a psychologist and helps to treat others.

The article further stated:

> "My concern is promising [victims] more involvement in a very adversarial system," she said. She says that, right now, victims have no role in a verdict unless they are a witness. "The crown has the final say."
>
> Triano-Antidormi said if the government were to make that change, it would only fuel vengeance in the victim "which from a physiological perspective doesn't help their healing or recovery."

I can only imagine the kind of pain this mother suffered. Despite all her personal pain, she has asked us to reflect on what we are doing here, and I am sure we will be doing that when we get to the committee stage.

L'Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes on April 3, 2014, basically said that this bill may provide real leverage and not just a false promise to be dangled before our eyes. However, then it went on to say it really rests on making resources available to victims once their rights have been infringed.

Once again, we keep going back to that resource item. Without that resource item, it points to how hollow this bill could be.

It went on to say the governments have a responsibility to recognize victims' rights, but also to help them exercise those rights. Just stipulating the rights without providing assistance for that next stage makes it very hard and almost hollow, so the association is very worried about that.

Clayton Ruby, criminal law expert, said:

> They need rehabilitative programs and services, and compensation from the government, and they've dropped all those expensive demands in favour of shallow symbolism.

Frank Addario stated:

> ...the...government's agenda is to position itself as tough on crime, even though it knows its measures have little real-world effect.
>
> It's cynicism masquerading as policy.

I am going to give my colleagues the benefit of the doubt. I am going to give them the benefit of the doubt because when we get to the committee stage to try to fix this bill with magnificent amendments, I know the Conservatives will pay attention and listen to some of the concerns we have. I am hoping they have been paying attention to some of the feedback out there as well, not just to the bits they want to hear but also to the rest.

Sharlene Lange, a victim's mother, stated:

> Beyond the sentencing stage of the process, the victims basically fall off the face of the earth....
>
> Rights need to go beyond the criminal process for this bill to even be a bill of rights.

She said she will continue to lobby until true financial compensation for victims exists.

There is absolutely no doubt that we need a bill of rights for victims. A study released in 2011 by the Department of Justice Canada found that the total cost of crime is an estimated $99.6 billion a year, 83% of which is borne by the victims.

● (2150)

With that in mind, I would urge my colleagues across the way to look at amendments at the committee stage, seriously consider what the bill really means, and make sure that resources and implementation mechanisms are in place so that victims truly feel supported and this does not turn out to be a sham.

● (2155)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech and for her indication that she would be supporting the bill at second reading and allowing the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which I sit on, to examine the bill in detail. I can assure her that the bill will be examined in detail by her colleagues and mine and by colleagues from the other parties at committee.

The member mentioned that we need to listen to the victims, and she quoted a few of them. She may know of Sharon Rosenfeldt, whose son was tragically murdered by Clifford Olson many years ago. She has been a tireless advocate for victims of crime for many years and she started an organization called Victims of Violence.

After the introduction of this bill, she said:

> Victims of Violence is very pleased that the government has indicated it's interest and intention to act in a variety of criminal justice and public security subject areas on behalf of victims of crime. In particular, we are pleased that the victims of crime now have a federal Victims Bill of Rights that is codified in law which is a major step for victims in Canada. The Bill contains worthwhile steps to confirm the importance of victims receiving information and having their voices heard. We are also pleased to see that the Bill contains a number of recommendations that have been put forward by victims over the past number of years.

I wonder if the hon. member would comment on that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure to work with my colleague across the way at committee and I know how seriously he takes his work. I really appreciate his putting forward that question.

I need him to know that is why I am supporting the bill going to committee stage, because even though the bill is not enough the way it is right now, it is a step in the right direction. It is a piece of legislation that many are disappointed with, but others are saying that at least it is a little baby step and it is the beginning.

In that way, let us make sure that when we get to the committee stage, we strengthen it by putting real teeth in it and by also making sure that resources are there so that victims get the support they need. They do not just need words; they also need support, and that support is what helps to heal them and rehabilitate them.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's comments that victims deserve more than just platitudes and statements.

We would like to see things that are far more tangible. In certain situations, for example, when I was chair of a justice committee, we tried to move into the area of restorative justice, whereby in certain situations victims can be a part of coming up with the dispositions of those individuals who caused the harm in whatever fashion it might have been.

In fact, there are many different things that government can be doing outside of legislation. The member made reference to a commitment, for example, to increase the number of police officers. It builds up an expectation. In Winnipeg, I know many police officers felt they were going to see an increase, and that never materialized.

I would argue that the reason back then—and I do not know if it has been put in place recently—was that no real negotiations took place between the province and the federal government over how that would be implemented. Yes, money was flagged for it, but it was never really acted upon.

Talk is cheap. Our constituents want to see more action, and the member might want to provide comment on the whole idea of action.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, just as my colleague has said, there were all kinds of commitments made during the last election for additional policing.

It is not just my riding, but other ridings that have had problems with safety and crime are asking the same questions about what happened.

My colleagues across the way, including the minister, mentioned earlier that they brought in mandatory minimum sentencing. If we could really end crime through mandatory minimum sentencing, then the prisons in the U.S. would not be overcrowded. The U.S. would not be spending such a major part of its budget on prisons, and there would have been a decrease in crime. Research shows that the U.S. is not seeing that decrease in crime. It is now looking more towards the rehabilitative approach that we have had in the past, rather than a purely punitive approach.

When we are looking at action, it starts quite early. It starts with the kind of investment we make in preschool education, with the kind of investment we make in K-12, and it also starts, when our students get off the tracks, with the kind of resources we provide to help them get back on the right track. It also means providing support for those suffering from mental health issues. The provinces have been cutting those programs because of funding.

● (2200)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I also support the bill. I take the same sort of view that my hon. colleague does: to support the bill, get it to second reading and hope for amendments.

I noted the member quoted from the first of the federal ombudsmen for victims of crime. I commend the current administration for creating that position.

However, the current federal ombudsman for victims of crime put out a statement on Bill C-32. I was familiar with the recommendations that went forward. That office had made 30 recommendations for what should be in a bill that spoke to the rights of victims of crime. Of the 30 recommendations put forward by that office, only four have been fully contained in this bill.

One I thought was particularly notable, and I hope we can get to it at committee for an amendment. I will not be a member of that committee, but I urge members to take note of it. It is that in order to benefit from any of the so-called rights that victims of crime will get under this bill, they need to know that they have to register themselves with the parole office or with the correctional service as a victim to get on the list to get the notification of such things as when the person who perpetrated the crime against them is being released and so on.

Surely we need to include in this bill very clear notification, clear communication to victims of how they get their rights and how they exercise those rights. That key piece is missing.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, there is much that is missing from this bill. That is why, when it gets to committee, I am sure there will be amendments galore to try to fix it.

My colleague just pointed out a reality that we face with a government that keeps moving closure and keeps shutting down debate. It refuses to listen to experts. An ombudsman appointed by the government makes 30 recommendations on what must be included in a bill, and the government rejects 26 of those items out of the 30 and cherry-picks the 4.

That actually adds to why I am so concerned about the inadequacies of this bill, and why we need to take our time to study it. However, as the government has already moved lengthy sittings and closure on all kinds of issues, I am not too hopeful that we will get to debate this in a meaningful way, to make some real changes and not be left with a sham.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Newton—North Delta. Her speech was very eloquent, and we should really examine it closely because she raised many very interesting points. I would like to ask her a quick question.

This bill proposes to create a complaints mechanism for victims. An agency would deal with those complaints at either the federal or provincial level. However, there is no funding for this. The federal government is once again mandating the provinces to spend money.

I would like the hon. member to comment on the fact that the federal government is always downloading costs onto the provinces. I would also like her to talk about the impact this will have on the services the provinces can provide.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I will keep it very brief. This is another example of a government that cannot work with partner groups and cannot work with the opposition to address some very critical issues.

I would say that there has probably been very little consultation with the provinces. They will be surprised at this. They will be left with the costs and everything. I am worried about what that is going to mean. It is going to mean that nothing is going to happen.

● (2205)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague, the hon. member for Don Valley West.

Every so often, members of Parliament see a bill that says to them, "This is why I was elected to Parliament. This is why I came to Ottawa on behalf of my constituents". For me, the victims bill of rights act is one of those bills.

Victims have been calling for these protections and these rights for years. For far too long, our justice system has focused on the rights of the accused and ignored the victims. Their loved ones have been murdered, they have been assaulted and harassed, and their homes have been broken into, yet the justice system often just treats them like just another witness.

I am very pleased to speak on this important bill, which would enshrine certain rights for victims of crime into federal legislation. In so doing, it is expected that the reforms would significantly improve the way our criminal justice system responds to victims, while at the same time recognizing the important role that they can and should play in the criminal justice system.

In the brief time available to me, I would like to focus on the general provisions and definitions and the primacy clause included in this bill.

The first thing to note is that bill proposes a definition of "victim" that recognizes the physical and emotional harms suffered as the result of the commission or alleged commission of an offence. It also recognizes that crime results in property damage and economic loss to victims. This definition would further inform the proposed changes to the definition of victim in the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. I support this broad definition, as it accurately reflects the realities of victims of crime.

This bill, and the rights contained therein, would apply to victims of all offences under the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act, as well as to several offences in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, and criminal offences in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

In unfortunate cases where the victim is deceased or incapable of exercising his or her rights, another person would be able to act on his or her behalf. For example, in cases where the victims are children or have suffered so much trauma that they are incapable of exercising their rights, someone such as a parent or a spouse would be able to speak for them and ensure that the victim's voice is not lost.

Every victim deserves to have an effective voice and to be heard. The bill would put these rights on paper and entrench them within the law.

However, this bill would not allow for the accused or an offender, including those persons found not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder or those who are unfit to stand trial, to be considered a victim in the offence in question, or to act on behalf of a victim. This is an important safeguard against the potential misuse of this bill.

The rights proposed in this bill would apply to victims involved in the Canadian criminal justice system. This means that tourists, temporary and permanent residents, and Canadian citizens could invoke their rights while they are in Canada. The rights of permanent residents and citizens could also be invoked while they are abroad. For example, a retired couple who have been the victims of fraud in Canada but who live in Florida during the winter could rely upon the proposed rights to receive information about the status of any ongoing Canadian investigation.

This bill would make it clear that the victims of crime have rights at every stage of the criminal justice system, from the investigation of an offence right through to the conditional release process, including during proceedings before review boards for accused persons found not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder or those who are unfit to stand trial. This would ensure that victims have rights, even in cases that are unresolved or where no accused or offender has yet been identified, such as in the case of families of missing persons.

I had the opportunity to serve on the special committee for the study into violence against indigenous women, the report of which was just recently tabled in the House of Commons. In one of those meetings, we heard from the families of victims of some of these indigenous women who have disappeared. Many of these women, as we know from the RCMP report, have been murdered. The families told us that they need the rights that are enshrined in this victims bill of rights. They need to know what is happening at every step of the police investigation into the disappearance of their loved ones. This is something that they have not always experienced in the past, and these rights would now be enshrined in this law. That is one of the reasons I feel so passionately about this bill.

● (2210)

Even if some victims of crime choose not to interact with the criminal justice system and exercise their rights, this bill would ultimately be beneficial to all victims and all Canadians. This bill would increase victims' awareness of their rights and enhance awareness of victims' needs among criminal justice professionals and the general public through the online resources and training opportunities facilitated by the government. Right now, there is no document that victims can consult if they want to know all of their rights within the federal justice system.

This bill would ensure that victims' rights are applied in a reasonable manner and in a way that is not likely to interfere with the proper administration of justice or ministerial discretion; endanger the life or safety of any individual; or cause injury to international relations, national defence, or national security. As this bill makes clear, victims would be informed and involved at every stage of the criminal justice process. That is very important. I myself have been a victim of crime and I know that throughout the investigative and prosecutorial processes I had to learn about what was going on through the news media because I was not receiving that information directly from the justice system.

These rights would be implemented through mechanisms provided by law. Indeed, these technical changes would give life to the rights contained in the Canadian victims bill of rights in a manner that is consistent with the unique constitutional and operational realities of the criminal justice system. As we know, the criminal justice system is a shared responsibility, with the federal government having constitutional authority over the criminal law and criminal procedure, and the provinces being responsible for the administration of justice. Accordingly, many of the proposed amendments would be implemented through the actions of the provinces. This bill respects the constitutional division of powers. This government does not intend nor wish to encroach upon provincial or territorial jurisdiction.

This bill does not seek to impede efficiencies in the criminal justice system. Inefficiencies and undue delays in the system would not serve the best interests of the victims. For example, delays in the system could result in charges being dropped and proceedings being stayed. An accused person must be tried within a reasonable time and no victim of crime should ever be denied justice because of delays in the system.

This bill would also provide internal safeguards so that authorities could always act in the public interest when victims' rights are being exercised. Authorities must maintain the ability to protect both victims and the Canadian public at all times.

Thus, this bill would also provide transformational change for victims while upholding the rule of law and respecting principles such as police and prosecutorial discretion. For instance, it is a well-recognized constitutional principle that the Attorneys General of this country must act independently of partisan concerns when exercising their delegated sovereign authority to instigate, continue, or terminate prosecutions. This bill respects that independence, and at the same time grants victims a greater voice in the process.

Let me also elaborate on the primacy clause proposed in this bill, which signals that victims' rights are to be taken seriously and given meaningful effect by all in the criminal justice system. It proposes as a general rule that all federal legislation would be required to the extent possible to be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the Canadian victims bill of rights. In circumstances where there is clear and irreconcilable conflict between a federal law and the Canadian victims bill of rights, the provisions of this bill would prevail. Victims' rights would be decided on a case-by-case basis whenever conflicts arose between this bill and laws contained in other federal acts.

The Canadian Bill of Rights, the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Official Languages Act, the Access to Information Act, and the Privacy Act would be expressly exempt from the primacy clause because they are also quasi-constitutional. These acts protect the rights and interests of all Canadians, including victims of crime, and they also have a clear link to the fundamental rights and freedoms found in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I firmly believe that this bill is the necessary catalyst for creating a culture of change in the criminal justice system so that the needs of victims of crime can be better met. Given the progressive and vital nature of this bill, I urge all of my colleagues on both sides of the House to support it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to ask the Minister of Public Safety a question.

In his speech, the minister gave us the impression that there is no budget allocated for this program. He even went farther by saying in response to a question that in general, the provinces have good services to help victims.

I think the lack of budget is problematic. The provinces have their own expenses and their own programs. Of course, it is a good step forward to create a federal program from a policy based on a new law. However, the fact that there is no budget is a real problem, and it will pose a major challenge for the provinces, which will have to add this to their list of responsibilities.

I would like to know whether the provinces were consulted.

● (2215)

[*English*]

The Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, as you just pointed out, I am sure the hon. member knows I am not the Minister of Public Safety, but I thank her for the promotion, in any event.

She will probably know, if she read economic action plan 2014, that it commits to supporting the implementation of a Canadian victims bill of rights. She will remember that the victim surcharge was doubled. That goes to the provinces for the administration of justice, including supporting the victims bill of rights. I believe she and her colleagues voted against that, which is unfortunate.

In recent years, the federal government has created the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. It has created the federal victims strategy, providing more than $120 million for programs and services that help give victims a more effective voice in the criminal justice system. It has allocated more than $10 million for new or enhanced child advocacy centres, since 2010, to address the needs of child and youth victims of crime. It has, as I mentioned earlier, doubled the victim surcharge, which provides funding for these services.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the member expand on his comments about victims who are children when he talked about an advocacy fund.

I do think it is important that we recognize that, yes, where we can improve upon legislation to protect our victims and provide rights, that is generally and principally a step in right direction.

However, having said that, I think we need to be more aggressive in terms of how we can, in a more tangible fashion, provide the resources that might be necessary; or as I said earlier this evening, are we really doing enough to prevent crimes from taking place in the first place, thereby preventing victims from becoming victims?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned child youth advocacy centres in his question, and I am really pleased he did that, in terms of child services for child victims of crime.

One of the most important things our government has done is support the creation of these child youth advocacy centres. There is a very important one in Toronto called the Boost child and youth advocacy centre. I hope our government will be able to support one in my Region of Peel, which is the cities of Mississauga and Brampton. A plan is being worked on to prepare one there very soon, and I hope it will be supported by the Department of Justice in the future.

On April 3, Karyn Kennedy, executive director of the Boost centre in Toronto, said the following about the bill of rights:

> Boost supports the work of the Federal Government in creating the Victims Bill of Rights. This legislation will give victims a much stronger voice and a greater presence in the criminal justice system.

She further said:

> We have been part of several consultations on the bill over the past year and are pleased to see the progress made.

I think that statement indicates that those who provide victim services to children see this as a big step forward in the services they provide.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague the member for Mississauga—Erindale for his contribution this evening and for sharing his time with me.

I am pleased to participate in the second reading debate on Bill C-32, the victims bill of rights act. Today I will focus my remarks on the proposed remedies provisions of the Canadian victims bill of rights.

The Canadian victims bill of rights is aimed at ensuring that victims are treated with dignity and respect during the various stages of the criminal justice process and that their voices are, in fact, heard.

Criminal justice professionals play a crucial role in the delivery of an effective criminal justice system. They do their jobs very well, often under very difficult circumstances, including dealing with victims with compassion and respect, but it does happen—and this is what victims told us—that they can feel that their rights have been breached or that they have been treated inappropriately. The Canadian victims bill of rights would ensure that there is a way to right a wrong when it happens.

The Minister of Justice consulted with victims and other stakeholders across the country from April to October 2013. Significant input was received, including in terms of options for a complaint resolution process. The Canadian victims bill of rights proposes a complete resolution process that is based on the principle that the particular agency responsible for the breach should be the first to receive the complaint. Subsection 25(1) of the bill makes this very clear.

Section 25 would also require all federal institutions involved in the criminal justice process to have mechanisms in place to receive complaints, to make recommendations for addressing any violations of rights, and to inform victims of the results of a complaint. This would include, for example, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, and the Correctional Service of Canada.

Similar mechanisms are also in place in agencies that are under provincial and municipal responsibility, such as the provincial crown prosecution services and municipal police forces.

This approach has many benefits. It would help foster the sort of remedial responses that victims have indicated would be meaningful to them. During consultations with stakeholders and victims groups, many suggested that in response to a breach of a victim's rights, the agency responsible should issue an apology directly to the victim for the misconduct. They also indicated that the agency responsible should fix the problem so that it does not happen again to another victim.

In other words, victims want remedies to include positive, responsive steps to change the culture or practices within an organization. They want remedies to be forward-looking and to address problems that have been detected. They want to spare other families from having to endure the same kind of mistreatment in the future.

Victims are best served by sharing their concerns directly with the agencies that are tasked with protecting them and by encouraging those agencies to see that every effort must be made to ensure that victims, as an integral part of the criminal justice process, are treated with the courtesy, compassion, and respect they deserve throughout every step of the process.

Apologies and improved practices are key elements that each criminal justice agency must consider directly as part of their responsibilities toward victims and toward Canadians more generally.

This approach would also have the benefit that criminal justice agencies would treat remedies for a breach of victims rights as part and parcel of their overarching obligations. It would also help keep costs manageable, as every such agency would already have in place a process for receiving complaints.

It is entirely possible that victims who made a complaint about the conduct of police, a prosecutor, or a correctional institution might not be satisfied with the response they received. Victims would, therefore, also be able to take their complaint to an authority that has jurisdiction over the agency that breached the right. Whether the agency is under federal or provincial authority, there are supervisory organizations that can take a fresh look at that complaint.

● (2220)

In the case of a breach by a federal agency, if a complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the victim, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime would assist victims with complaints and work informally with relevant federal agencies to address the breach and improve practices for dealing with victims of crime.

In regard to an allegation of infringement by a provincial or municipal agency, the bill respects the split constitutional jurisdiction and proposes that the applicable remedy is the remedy set out in the provincial law, policies, or practices. Provincially, remedial options may include ombudsmen for the province, specialized victims offices, or designated police oversight bodies, for instance.

The victims bill of rights is the result of a balanced approach. Under the bill, victims of crime would not have standing to make complaints about breaches of their rights in court within the context of criminal proceedings against the accused. It is important to ensure that criminal trials are not sidetracked to deal with government agencies that allegedly have infringed the rights of victims. The criminal trial process must stay focused on determining the guilt or innocence of the person accused of a crime. State mistreatment of crime victims must be appropriately dealt with in its own right through separate processes.

I hope that all members of the House will join me in supporting this bill. We have heard tonight from a number of members on all sides of the House who support the bill and intend to vote in its favour. It would give victims a strong voice in the criminal justice system through the creation of rights for victims of crime and a strong remedial scheme to address breaches of those rights.

● (2225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my colleague, who seems to be deeply committed to Bill C-32, An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts. I have a number of questions I would like to ask him about the bill, but I will keep it to one brief and specific question.

Could he give the House an explanation for the delay between the time the promise was made to draft a victims bill of rights and the time the bill was actually introduced? If memory serves, the promise was made in 2006 during the election when the Conservatives managed to take power. Why did they wait so long before introducing Bill C-32, which we are discussing today? What was the reason for that delay?

[*English*]

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, our government has been committed to finding resolutions to crime and to fighting crime since we came to office in 2006. The Canadian victims bill of rights presents no different an approach to finding a resolution to issues that are important to Canadians. Clearly, we have been addressing crime and issues to reduce crime since we arrived in government. Many of those crime bills that we have been so aggressively supporting throughout that timeframe have, regrettably, been opposed by the opposition.

This particular legislation would bring a different focus toward addressing the needs of victims. This bill addresses the issues that need to be completed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member did not necessarily answer the question that was posed, and it was a legitimate question.

The Conservatives have talked for years about bringing in a victims bill of rights. They have made election platform issues of it. It was referenced as long ago as the 2006 election. I do not know if, in fact, that it was an election platform issue in 2006.

Could my colleague tell us to the best of his knowledge if it was an election platform issue for the Conservative Party in 2006? Could he provide some feedback as to why he believes it has taken this long to get the bill brought forward, if in fact that is the case?

● (2230)

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer with regard to 2006 specifically. I did run in the election in 2006. Clearly, creating safer streets and communities for Canadians was integral in that campaign.

As far as the Canadian victims bill of rights goes, let us address some of the issues and what we have accomplished over the course of that time frame. We established the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. We created the federal victims strategy, with more than $120 million allocated since 2007 for programs and services to help victims and give them a more effective voice in the criminal justice system. We allocated more than $10 million for new or enhanced child advocacy centres. We introduced legislation to double the victims' surcharge and to make it mandatory. We eliminated the so-called faint hope clause.

Victims have been central and core to everything we have done since we have come into power. I clearly believe this bill brings that focus to fruition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the excellent member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

We have before us a bill that is supposed to expand victims' rights. It is a step in the right direction to improve the lot of victims. With all due respect, and contrary to what the member for Don Valley West just mentioned, the NDP believes in victims' rights. We always want victims to have real rights, not meaningless rights.

The problem with this bill is that some aspects are bogus, starting with the fact that it took a year to hold a consultation. Several recommendations were put forward during that year but, unfortunately, just four of them were included in the legislation.

The government wants to establish a new process so that victims can assert their rights, but they will have to go through a process created by the provinces. Once again, the government is going to ask the provinces to spend money on a federal bill. If this legislation is really going to create a victims bill of rights, resources should be allocated, but that is not provided in the bill before us.

The bill is supposed to expand victims' rights and the definition of "victim". This is a good idea in itself. It deserves a debate in committee after second reading. This bill amends the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to permit victims to see a photograph of the offender at the time of his release. Once again, at first glance, this seems to be a very good idea. It must be examined in committee so that we can hear experts on this issue. I think most experts will fully agree on that provision.

The bill also seeks to amend the Criminal Code to ensure the court informs victims of any agreement reached between the accused and the prosecutor, once a guilty plea is accepted. I am looking forward to hearing experts on this aspect, because it deserves a great deal of attention. Legal experts will have a lot to say on this issue. I believe this bill warrants the attention of the House and of the experts. I hope some witnesses will have a lot to say about this.

The bill amends the Canada Evidence Act to provide that no person is incompetent, or uncompellable, to testify for the prosecution by reason only that they are married to the accused. This changes a fundamental aspect of our system and it also deserves a lot of attention. Until now, it was always presumed that a person did not have to testify against his or her spouse. I am looking forward to hearing the experts on this provision.

I am going to quote Michael Spratt, who said:

● (2235)

[*English*]

> Bill C-32 also amends sections of the Canada Evidence Act dealing with spousal incompetence compellability. Historically the Crown could not compel (force) an accused's spouse to testify. This is no longer the case. Under bill C-32 no person is incompetent or uncompellable to testify for the prosecution because of marriage. The new legislation does not, however, remove spousal privilege - found in section 4(3) of the Canada Evidence Act.
>
> A spouse still cannot be forced to testify about spousal communications.

Here is the interesting point, "They can however be forced to testify about all other manner of issues—including issues that may impact on the sanctity of the spousal relationship". As Mr. Spratt points out, "It is unclear what this has to do with victims rights".

To continue the quote, it states:

> It is interesting to pause to note that: It is also unclear why the government did not amend the wording of section 4(3) of the Canada Evidence Act. This section speaks of 'husband' and 'wife'...

[*Translation*]

I would like to come back to this. I am a bit disappointed and discouraged that our Canadian laws still make reference to marriage as being between a man and a woman. I thought that was already resolved: a marriage can be between two men, two women or a man and a woman. Once again, we see that Canadians laws unfortunately have not been amended to reflect the new reality that has existed for many years.

I hope that the government will take this opportunity to amend the act to reflect the reality of the times. Society has evolved, and unfortunately, the House seems to have a very hard time evolving at the same time.

Let us get back to the bill. I look forward to hearing what the experts have to say about the fact that spouses will now be able to testify against each other. This could fundamentally change the relationship between married couples. This deserves to be studied.

Another provision in this bill would create a mechanism to enable victims to file a complaint with federal and provincial departments for a denial of any of their rights under the bill of rights. This could be at the provincial or federal level, but most rights fall under the jurisdiction of provincial courts.

If victims file complaints through a new mechanism, this will create a new bureaucracy, largely at the provincial level. Furthermore, there is nothing in the bill about funding for this bureaucracy. We have to assume that the province will once again have to find its own resources to pay for something imposed in a federal law.

It is wrong to think that the provinces have unlimited amounts of money to spend. The federal government is once again offloading a responsibility onto the provinces without providing any funding. That is unfortunate. We see this too often in this House, and we are seeing it in the bill we are debating tonight.

I hope that the government will examine the situation carefully and provide funding for the bill of rights it is proposing today. It does not mean much to create a bill of rights that does not include funding, especially for the less fortunate victims. These victims do not have the means to exercise their rights. An inaccessible right is an illusory right.

In a previous Parliament, this same government eliminated a program that gave victims recourse under the charter. That is very unfortunate, because once again, if a charter bestows rights that are inaccessible for financial reasons, those rights are completely illusory.

We in Canada believe in our charter as well as in the bill of rights being debated today, but the fact remains that no money means no rights. It is a well-known fact. When it comes to asserting their rights, underprivileged people need more support than privileged people.

This bill does not go far enough. I hope that expert witnesses will point that out in committee and suggest improvements to the bill.

One of the last points I would like to mention is that the bill will codify the right to make a restitution order. It will also "specify that the victim surcharge must be paid within the reasonable time established by the lieutenant governor of the province in which it is imposed".

● (2240)

We see that ultimately the Governor in Council will get to decide what is a reasonable time. Although that is not unacceptable, there is some detail lacking. I hope the committee will clarify that issue.

I would also like to add that many people have publicly shared testimonials about this bill. I planned to discuss a press release issued by the Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes, which also raised a number of questions about the bill, but I will save that discussion for another time.

I hope that the committee will take into account the testimonials we have heard so far, as a way to hear from more citizens and experts. This bill deserves our consideration and support at second reading so that it can benefit from a more thorough study.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising one of the aspects of this victims bill of rights that is concerning to me and to others, and that is removing the spousal immunity from testimony. As he and others have noted, this could lead to women who are in abusive relationships being afraid to report to police that they have been victimized by an abusive partner for fear they will be forced into testimony with that partner. That is one aspect of the bill.

Another aspect that brings people into close contact with a potential abuser is that the bill does not require that victims use, for instance, at parole hearings, separate entrances and have an ability to be isolated from the accused.

In these two instances, it could actually re-traumatize the victim. In the case of removing spousal immunity, it could result in women choosing not to report crimes when they have been the victim in a marriage relationship.

I would like to hear any comments. I certainly hope we can get this amended in committee.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, that is a very appropriate question. It is worrisome that we could be putting people at risk by changing an element that has been constant in the legal system in our country for many years. Those kinds of changes need to be addressed and need to be studied very carefully before they are put into place. I share the member's concerns. We need to address this issue at committee.

I look forward to expert testimony. A lot of women's rights groups are going to have some interesting things to say about that particular aspect.

Again, we need to discuss this bill further. The idea of this bill, in principle, is a good one; however, it seems to lack an awful lot of forethought. We need to develop these ideas further. As the member points out, quite rightly, we might be putting at risk the very victims we are trying to defend.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine for raising some extremely important points about Bill C-32 in his speech.

I completely agree with him that it was about time that a bill was introduced and debated. For years the Conservative government promised a victims bill of rights.

In his speech, he mentioned the fact that no funding has been allocated for the Canadian victims bill of rights. I did some research on that. On the Prime Minister's website, there is mention of the right to restitution under the Canadian victims bill of rights:

> The Government will provide dedicated funding to support the implementation of the Canadian victims bill of rights through existing resources as well as the allocation of new federal resources.

Unfortunately, the resources have not yet materialized.

What does my colleague think of the fact that the Prime Minister promised to make funds available from new and existing resources, but, once again, we have yet to see the money?

● (2245)

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. She has raised an interesting point.

The Conservatives have been promising for several years to bring forward such a bill. They have gotten a lot of mileage out of suggesting that there would be a bill to protect victims. They recently held bogus consultations. Quite frankly, I do not know if the Conservatives would be taken seriously by victims groups.

We are seeing the result in the House. Very few recommendations made during the consultations were included in the bill before us. One of the recommendations made mention of the fact that the mechanisms that will be created to help victims require funding. If no funding is provided, it is obvious that that the rights are window dressing and an illusion.

I hope that the government will think about the fact that it has promised for eight years to introduce a bill here in the House. I hope that they will keep all the promises they made in the past and create a Canadian victims bill of rights worthy of that name.

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to join my colleagues in tonight's debate on Bill C-32, An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts.

I would first like to thank my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine for his eloquent speech. He has already highlighted many issues that are important to the NDP.

I feel compelled to repeat something he said right off the bat, namely that, in our opinion, support for victims is essential. It is a fundamental issue for the NDP. Some Conservative members have tried to suggest otherwise, simply because our vision of support for victims of crime in Canada is slightly different from their own.

It is important that we put the focus back where it belongs, namely victims' rights, period. That is the priority. We have been hearing about a Canadian victims bill of rights for ages now. In fact, it has been eight years. The Conservatives first mentioned the idea during the 2006 election campaign. We have been waiting since then. Indeed, many press conferences and photo ops have come and gone —methods to which we have become accustomed, as the Conservatives have relied on them in many other files, like the F-35s, to name but one.

We had to wait until today for them to introduce a bill which, at first glance, seems to respond to many of the needs expressed by victims. However, when we dig a bit deeper we can see that there are still some flaws in the bill that was introduced.

We believe that this is an important issue. That is why we will support the bill at second reading and ensure that it gets sent to committee so that we can make the necessary improvements to it.

Numerous experts, families of victims and victims themselves have publicly shared their opinion on the bill. There is a sense of satisfaction about the fact that progress is slowly being made. However, there are still some elements that need to be amended.

The bill, as it stands, would codify federal rights for victims of crime—namely, the right to information, protection, participation and restitution—and it would amend the Criminal Code, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Canada Evidence Act in order to incorporate those rights.

The key changes that are part of the bill before us today would expand the definition of "victim" to include physical or emotional harm, property damage or economic loss. It would also clarify the fact that a victim's spouse may testify if the victim is deceased or incapable of acting on their own behalf, as long as the couple has been in a conjugal relationship for more than a year.

The bill would also amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to give victims the right to view a photo of and certain information about the offender at the time of release and to obtain more details about the release date and conditions, and various other things like that.

At first glance, as I said earlier, it sounds pretty good. Unfortunately, with the Conservatives, the devil is often in the details. To be quite honest, I am very interested to see what will happen in committee. The government has not toned down its rhetoric: victims first, and tough on crime. We hear the words but, unfortunately, they are rarely followed by action.

I have been a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence for a few months now. During today's meeting, we looked at sexual abuse within the Canadian Armed Forces. Where was the Minister of National Defence? He was not there. When the article in *L'actualité* was published, he issued a public statement in which he expressed his anger and surprise even though the government has known for years, at least since 1998, perhaps before, that sexual misconduct occurs within the Canadian Forces. Unfortunately, the victims of these acts are all too often women, who are already under-represented within the armed forces.

● (2250)

The current framework for filing a complaint and getting support is far from adequate. Even so, the government has shown no leadership on this issue. A Canadian victims bill of rights is all well and good, but it is not enough. These men and women, who are ready to risk their lives for Canada and to defend our cherished values around the world and who experience sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces, are completely abandoned by the government.

It has washed its hands of the whole thing and is trying to blame the Canadian Armed Forces themselves. I think it is completely hypocritical of the government to say it will do anything to protect victims' rights, no matter who they are or where they are, then turn around and just ignore a situation that is resulting in an untold number of victims. Apparently five individuals in the Canadian Armed Forces become victims of sexual misconduct every day. That is a huge number, but the current government is not showing any leadership.

I appreciate the initiative to introduce a Canadian victims bill of rights, but the government needs to go beyond words and rhetoric. We need a really effective charter that will guarantee that people can exercise their due rights once they become victims of crime.

I hope that the government will go beyond photo ops and rhetoric. A little earlier, my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine mentioned a major problem with the bill, and that is the fact that no financial resources have been allocated in order to implement it. All of the responsibility for guaranteeing these rights is being put on the provinces and territories. Once again, the government is shirking its responsibilities. The Conservatives talk about a great principle that is important to them. That is all well and good, but it will be up to someone else to deal with that responsibility and take care of victims.

I hope that this major problem will be dealt with in committee. Earlier, my colleague from Alfred-Pellan asked the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine a question. She clearly indicated that the federal government had already promised funding, first to implement the Canadian victims bill of rights and then to compensate victims of crime. However, there is still no money being allocated. Were these just empty promises made by the government? I hope not.

The Conservatives are always saying that we need to be tough on crime and make life harder for offenders who are in prison. However, they are not prepared to take this initiative all the way. I find that disappointing.

The Canadian victims bill of rights responds to certain requests made by victims and victims groups. However, there is nothing in the bill of rights that allows for the creation of legal obligations for people working within the justice system. The bill contains a potential mechanism for filing complaints with federal departments, agencies and organizations that play a role in the justice system when victims' rights have been violated. However, once again, there is very little information about this mechanism. That is rather troubling. If the government is going to propose such measures, then it has to support them and make sure they have a tangible impact, which does not seem to be the case right now.

Despite the problems we have raised, it is important to the NDP to ensure that victims of crime across the country are guaranteed certain rights and that they have a more effective voice in the justice system, which is not currently the case.

I am under the impression that the Conservative government is trying to score political points at the expense of victims. I hope that the government will prove me wrong with the work that is done in committee.

● (2255)

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier for her speech, which, as usual, came from the heart. I know that victims rights are extremely important to my colleague, as they are to all my NDP colleagues.

A number of questions remain unanswered when it comes to the Conservative government's intention to provide funding for the Canadian victims bill of rights. The lack of consultation with the provinces and territories is a recurring theme for the government across the way and we are seeing that again here, unfortunately, with Bill C-32.

I did a bit of research and found that the provinces already have some provisions, programs, and charters. For example, the Province of Ontario has had its own Victims Bill of Rights since 1995.

What does my colleague think of the Conservative government's lack of consultation? Is there overlap with the provinces and territories?

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question. I had the chance to sit with her a few times in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I know that she does extraordinary work in this committee and the issue before us here today is very important to her.

Indeed, this lack of consultation is a recurring theme with this government. The practical effect of the victims bill of rights as currently presented is simply to harmonize federal legislation with what already exists in many provinces and territories.

In fact, the government did not go to the provinces and territories to ask them how everything might be improved or to find out what they really need to protect and guarantee victims' rights. The Conservative government ignored all that. They are in the habit of introducing a bill to us as a done deal and then maybe consulting and listening afterward, but usually not. They did indeed do some consultations in person between April and October 2013, and online from May to September 2013.

However, did they sit down with the justice ministers and public safety ministers from the various provinces and territories? I highly doubt it and that is obvious in the bill before us.

● (2300)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, any discussion about victims and crime should also include the provinces. Justice and law enforcement are basically under provincial jurisdiction, aside from the RCMP. Therefore, it is essential that we consult the provinces about any legislation regarding justice and victims' rights.

Victims need to be protected. This issue is very important to me and to all New Democrats.

What approach does my colleague think the government should take in consulting with the provinces on legal matters and the protection of victims' rights?

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Pontiac for his excellent question.

It is very important for any good Canadian government to consult with the provinces and territories. We live in a federation. This is not a unitary government, and therefore we must consult the other levels of government before introducing a bill that could have a direct impact on their jurisdictions.

That is a basic notion of federalism that I did not think I would have to explain to the House at this time of night. Unfortunately, the government opposite could really benefit from this approach, since it always seems to skip that step.

The Conservatives introduced a bill but left out the provinces. They did not ask the provinces what resources they would need or what the bill should focus on. There were no consultations. A few experts were consulted, but the provinces and territories were ignored. That makes absolutely no sense.

* * *

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

VOTE ON MOTION NO.10—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Further to the point of order raised at the end of tonight's vote on government Motion No. 10, I have reviewed the tape, as I had committed to do, and can now confirm that the hon. member for Peterborough did rise when the yeas were called. As such, and specifically in this case, because there was an error in the voting process, his vote will be recorded accordingly.

That being said, the confusion tonight should again serve as a reminder to all members to remain attentive throughout the duration of votes, rising at the appropriate time in order to have their votes recorded as they intended and listening to ensure that their names have indeed been called. This would be of great assistance to the Chair, and it is only by doing so that the Chair and the vote-callers are not left guessing and that members' votes will be properly recorded.

[*Translation*]

VICTIMS BILL OF RIGHTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-32, An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Sherbrooke.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their warm welcome.

I must first point out that I will be sharing my time on Bill C-32, An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts, with the member representing the good citizens of Hull—Aylmer.

I would like to mention that we will be supporting the bill at second reading stage because, as we have said a number of times and as we repeat every day, the NDP is a strong advocate for victims' rights. We will continue to support them and defend them in the House. I am certain that the government is also showing good faith in all of this with this long-overdue bill of rights.

I had heard about the bill of rights in the past. A number of groups in Sherbrooke had talked to me about it even before the bill was introduced. The Conservative government had been promising this Canadian victims bill of rights since 2006. Stakeholders and experts had already expressed a number of concerns.

My colleague from Pontiac mentioned a little earlier that the provinces also have an important role to play in this discussion. In fact, they are responsible for the administration of justice. They must be consulted as much as possible and their views must be considered in the process leading up to the drafting of such a bill. Perhaps that is why it took eight years. I hope not, because if it really were a Conservative priority, the bill would have been brought forward well before 2014 because they have been promising this bill of rights since 2006.

We have to admit that this bill of rights is nonetheless a step in the right direction because it will give victims of crime certain rights. They really should have these rights because, no matter the crime, it will haunt them for the rest of their lives. Regardless of the sentence handed out to the wrongdoer, victims of crime will remember the event, which will stay with them and affect them perhaps for the rest of their lives.

This bill focuses specifically on victims' rights in relation to the legal system and legal proceedings. That is good. It talks about broadening the definition of the word “victim”. It also talks about amending the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to give victims the right to see a photograph of the offender. It would also give victims a lot more information once the offender is released, as well as more information during parole hearings. Victims are given a lot of rights, and that is a very good thing because they deserve to have that information. The bill is generally positive despite the flaws I will talk about shortly.

It is important to give victims these rights within the legal process, but it is also important to support them for the rest of their lives when they experience problems because of these crimes. It is so important for the government to support these people who did not choose to be victims.

The government needs to do more. This bill of rights is a good thing, but it is not the solution to all of the problems. The government has to work even harder to support victims of crime, who have to live with that crime for the rest of their lives.

I cannot give a speech about victims of crime without talking about preventing crime too. Crime prevention is the best possible solution. The government has to do much more to prevent people from committing crimes.

● (2305)

The best way to help victims is to prevent them from becoming victims. I think we can all agree that one of the best ways to help them is to prevent crime. The Conservatives are much more about punishment, so they introduce new punitive measures. Those are necessary, because we will never completely eradicate crime. It is practically impossible. Still, the government should introduce measures to prevent crime in the first place. That is an important solution. That was a digression.

There are many worthwhile things as well as many flaws in this bill, as I mentioned earlier. Among those flaws is a lack of funding for this bill of rights. Promises and fine speeches abound. The minister sends out multiple press releases and gets a lot of political mileage, so to speak, from this bill. However, there still is no funding, despite promises from the Prime Minister himself, as my colleague from Alfred-Pellan pointed out. No one has seen that money yet. We hope it will be part of the next budget. There may even be supplementary estimates. Who knows? Only the government can say. We hope that the promised funding will show up eventually, so that the bill of rights can go beyond mere words and have some clout once it is passed by Parliament. This bill of rights must be more than well-meaning, empty promises. Victims want the rights set out in the bill of rights, and they must be able to exercise these rights.

Earlier, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness said that the provinces have many programs available. The entire problem cannot be shifted to the provinces, even though the Conservatives have a habit of doing just that. The government needs to shoulder its responsibilities as well and help victims directly.

Many people have commented on the Conservatives' bill. Not all of the comments were positive. Mr. Sullivan, the first federal ombudsman for victims of crime, had nothing but good things to say about the bill.

He thinks it is a good bill. However, he feels that the biggest problem is that the Minister of Justice promised the bill would put victims at the heart of the justice system, and it falls very short of that.

He is also unhappy about the fact that the government made promises about the charter but, in the end, nothing come of them.

He also stated that the charter is somewhat positive but that it basically just codifies what is already happening within the justice system. The practices are already in place, but now they will be codified. They are already being followed in different provinces. Mr. Sullivan added that all this really does is bring it in line with provincial laws.

The government promised something totally new but, ultimately, this looks a lot like what is already happening in the provinces. It is positive, but it is not what we were expecting. The government did not keep its promises. It has been talking about this since 2006.

● (2310)

Finally, it is here and let us just say that the more we learn about the bill, the more disappointed we get.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's speech from across the way. I find it very difficult, though, to reconcile what the member has said to this House in regard to the shouldering of responsibility. He said that the federal government is not shouldering its responsibility in helping the provinces, because the implementation is not paid for by the federal government.

When we looked at changing the victim surcharge, that member and his party voted against it and against giving more resources to the provinces. When the Minister of Finance in this House put forward a budget for 2014, that member voted against it, even though it said right in the budget that implementation costs for this particular piece of legislation would be covered by the federal government.

I ask that member to stand in his place and explain to the House how he can reconcile his statement, given his and his party's voting history. It makes no sense.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer my colleague's very specific question. She just reaffirmed a point we have been making since I was elected in 2011. The government introduces omnibus bills, including budget implementation bills, and puts all sorts of things in the same basket.

Then we vote against one specific thing in the budget, when the government is asking us to vote on a group of legislative measures that affect many different things. If I were to vote on specific things that were not part of the omnibus bills, my vote might be quite different.

I think this is rather consistent with what I have been saying today.

● (2315)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member is in regard to the government's approach to dealing with legislation of this nature. In principle, it is positive and may be a step forward, but it should be recognized that the government needs to do more than just bring in legislation, proclaim the name, and then champion it as something that will resolve a wide variety of issues.

In fact, we need to be more proactive to prevent having victims in the first place and have more tangible resources provided to support victims, especially where victims endure quite a bit of mental duress, among other things.

I wonder if the member might pick up on the point that talk is great, but action is necessary to have the desired impact that Canadians would like to see.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the excellent question.

I did not have the chance to elaborate on that in my speech. Indeed, the government promised a bill for years and it was highly anticipated. Finally, the experts who analyzed the bill after it was introduced a few months ago said that it would not change much and it was not what was promised.

The bill is positive, but it does nothing to keep the promises that were made. Will it really help certain victims in their daily lives? There are experts who are not so sure. They think this is the government's way of being able to say that it kept its promise. However, this is not at all what people were expecting. The experts were disappointed. We have notes and comments indicating their disappointment.

The government likes to talk, but when the time comes for it to take meaningful action, its bills do not do enough. That is too bad. I hope this will change in committee. That is what the official opposition hopes. We do our job well. We hope that we will be able to propose amendments and improve the bill. We always know our stuff, and we work very hard to improve bills in committee. I will vote in favour of this bill at second reading.

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak about the Canadian victims bill of rights tonight. This is an important topic and we are very open to discussing it.

For once we can work together to try to make improvements and come up with a bill that will improve the lives of the Canadian public and the people affected.

I hope that the government will also be receptive in committee when we propose amendments to help improve this bill, so that we can be more proactive. I think that is important at this stage.

I am thinking of all the victims, including aboriginal women, and the people around them who have gone through very difficult times. I am thinking of women primarily, but also of homosexuals who have had to deal with prejudices at National Defence and the RCMP, where they were victims of all sorts of violence. They were not able to speak out about it or did not dare to. I hope that this proposed bill of rights will make a difference.

I must say that it is rather unfortunate to see that the government did not use this bill as an opportunity to respond more proactively to the recommendations made by the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. The ombudsman actively participated in the consultations and made recommendations. I could name a few. My colleagues also spoke about them. For instance, victims need to be treated fairly and respectfully and they need to receive personalized attention. They are entitled to speak and to have a standing in court. They have the right to information.

This bill should also be something that, as Canadians and as a government, we are proud to have introduced. We must also feel proud of it later. Victims and their families must be given full support, including financial support. They must be given help to move forward so that they feel better and more comfortable. It would be nice if they could say that, after everything they went through, at least they got the support they needed and that they were grateful to the government in power and Parliament for helping them to meet their objectives.

It is important for victims to be part of the system. They need to feel good, to feel protected, to feel safe, and to feel comfortable throughout the entire process.

Of course, the bill has some really worthwhile provisions that could help to broaden the definition of victims of crime and codify victims' right to information, protection, participation and compensation.

We are talking a lot about victims. However, I am also thinking of the families, friends and others who live with the victim. I would like to see all this support extended to victims' loved ones for the future, not just immediately following the crime, but afterward too.

We must ensure that we have a policy statement that serves a purpose. We cannot just have a nice bill that victims say does not really change anything for them.

Victims have a lot of expectations. Parliament did not address all of these issues and expectations in this bill of rights. These victims need support, not just nice words and press conferences.

I would like to talk about some of the testimony that was given by jurists and experts with regard to the bill.

● (2320)

I am thinking about William Trudell, chair of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers. He said, “I don’t think this bill was necessary because basically what’s needed is education and properly funded victim services across the country.” We can do that if we propose amendments to the bill. The committee can respond to that. The bill would then meet the needs of victims and their families.

I would like to quickly read out what Andrew Swan, Manitoba's attorney general, had to say. Just before the bill was introduced, Manitoba's justice minister, Andrew Swan, told *The National* that there is benefit in Ottawa creating a national program, arm in arm with the provinces. “We don't want this to be an exercise where the federal government lays down some regulations, say they've done their job and then wash their hands of it.”

The Minister of Public Safety's speech did not give me the impression that this has been a collaborative effort. I asked one of his colleagues about that, and I was not told that they would work with the provinces or that they had worked with them. On the contrary, I was told that they were expecting that the provinces would take over the program. That is a dangerous approach. It is unfortunate. We have seen the same thing happen in other situations, where the government in power has passed laws before telling the provinces to deal with the changes. It is very unfortunate.

The Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes was calling for the necessary resources to be allocated so that victims can be informed, heard and supported.

Today, I contacted the Outaouais Crime Victims Assistance Centre, an organization in my region funded by the Quebec government. What I learned was very interesting. In fact, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone in that organization for the work they do and the way they support victims. I learned that 17 centres across the province reach up to 100,000 victims. In the Outaouais alone, 5,000 victims have turned to the centre for help. The person I talked to told me that the centre's priority was to show victims consideration. This is the main goal, the priority. People who have been victims of a crime want to be treated and seen as full-fledged citizens as they go through that crisis.

Victims also want to feel safe. This is not to say that they always need someone by their side. Safety means psychological and physical safety. Across Quebec, one way to help victims is through video-link testimony. When victims do not want to meet their attacker, they can use alternate ways to testify.

She emphasized the fact that we must work together with the provinces. She says that what is currently happening is positive and that this is causing a change in mentality and a renewal. However, she would like this to go further. As I was saying earlier, she fears that the expectations will be quite high. She talked to me about some of her experiences with the victims. The papers talk about cases where victims report someone who was close to them 25 years after the fact. They have a hard time doing so and they are torn between reporting the offence and not wanting their abuser to go to jail. They would like these people to have some support.

She thinks it is extraordinary that the crown prosecutor from Quebec is taking over. We must consider all that. Again, I commend them on their excellent work. I would also like to mention that in Quebec there are victim support agencies. There is the Centre d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions sexuelles de l'Outaouais, which does excellent work in the Outaouais and elsewhere in Quebec, and the Centre Mechtilde, which also does good work.

We should be talking about prevention, assistance and subsidies. If we added what Quebec and the other provinces are doing, this would be extraordinary.

● (2325)

Then we would be able to talk about prevention and training.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Hull—Aylmer for her excellent speech.

It is important to acknowledge the significant work that the associations are doing for victims' rights in our communities and in the various regions that we represent across Canada. It is extremely important to acknowledge all the hard work that these community agencies do from day to day, whether for human rights in mental health or for the rights of victims of criminal offences. I thank my colleague for doing that.

I work a lot with these associations as part of the work I do on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We often hear testimony concerning private members' bills or even government bills that deal with victims' rights. I work closely with the Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes, which had this to say about the victims bill of rights:

> [C]ertain conditions must be met if this bill of rights is going to have real influence and not just make empty promises. It will be effective only if the mechanisms giving the victims recourse when their rights have been infringed upon are truly accessible. This is a major issue. Resources will have to be allocated so that victims can be informed, heard and supported in their dealings with federal... departments, agencies and ministries...

What does my colleague think about the fact that the Conservatives did not allocate any funding for the Canadian victims bill of rights?

● (2330)

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question, which gets right to the heart of what people think and what they are saying about help for victims and about bills.

It is all well and good to pass bills but all of these crisis centres need money and resources. I spoke with the Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions sexuelles or CALAS, who have been operating for years despite a lack of resources and support. Doing all of this work is taking a toll on them but they continue to do it and they continue to have someone available 24/7.

It is therefore a great pity that the government did not complete this bill by providing the means to fulfill its ambitions in order to help people and provide the funding necessary to put a stop to this type of violence and decrease the number of victims.

I encourage anyone who needs help to contact these organizations. I am going to post the addresses and telephone numbers on my Facebook page. I encourage the women and men who are listening to me today and who have something to say, to speak out. They will get the support they need.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a very important question about one of the criticisms directed at this bill.

The government says that it wants to give victims more information and let them know about the parole hearings held for people who have committed crimes. The criticism was that this will not change anything about the fact that victims who want the information will be required to register and state explicitly that they want the information. The government could have chosen to make the process automatic, thereby dispensing with the need for victims to register in order to receive information.

Does my colleague think that this is something we could discuss further in order to ensure that victims can get the information without having to go through a process to request it?

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I agree that it should be automatic. In fact, that suggestion came up during my discussion with the person in charge of victims' assistance centres in the Outaouais. They have the resources to follow up with victims and support them. I found that very interesting. There is never enough ongoing help for victims. They should not have to wait or keep going back to get information. I think that should be automatic.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just to clarify, I will use the term "victim" in my speech to mean the person against whom a crime has been directly committed as well as to designate those close to the victim who have also suffered and who often continue to suffer gravely as a result of the criminal act.

This bill is a step in the right direction. The Liberals support the bill.

Among other things, Bill C-32 would provide victims with an important right to information. For example, the bill would give victims the right to request information about a criminal case, including information about an offender's release date and a photo of the offender showing what he or she looks like after release. It would also allow victims to obtain a copy of a bail or probation order. This right to information is an important right from a victim's point of view.

There is general agreement that the bill does not go far enough. As a case in point, Sue O'Sullivan, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, has said, "...the bill fails to fully address the breadth and depth of victims' needs and concerns".

If I may digress slightly from the content of the bill, I would like to say that victims' rights should not be used as a political wedge. I find there has been a regrettable tendency by the government to use a crime and punishment agenda as a partisan wedge, a way of separating the good guys who care from the others who purportedly do not, all for the purpose of political gain. The issue of victims' rights should not be transformed into a competition about which political party is more compassionate toward victims. I do not believe anyone in this House lacks compassion for victims. Some of us have likely been victims of crimes ourselves, from victims of small theft to more serious crimes that may have involved varying degrees of physical assault and harm, or we know people, loved ones, neighbours, or friends, who have been victims.

No one is interested in coddling criminals. In matters of law, however, the Liberals want to ensure that the key principles we as a society value and have fought hard to establish are respected, not only because those principles, like the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair trial, and the need to respect charter rights in investigations and sentencing, have proved to be immensely useful in avoiding miscarriages of justice but also because to ignore those principles means threatening the very goal of upholding an effective justice system that protects society and punishes those who have transgressed against others.

Laws that do not respect constitutional principles eventually are invalidated by the courts. This leaves a dangerous void that is of no use to anyone.

The interests of victims have been an integral part of human justice from the earliest times. I know the government often likes to say that the justice system ignores victims and that victims are not considered in any way, shape, or form in the justice system. They kind of impugn the justice system, which I think is an unhealthy attitude. That seems to be the impression that is often created when one listens to pronouncements from the government. However, the idea of restitution for victims of crime is an age-old concept. The Code of Hammurabi in ancient Babylon, the old Roman laws of the Twelve Tables, and the Old Testament all codified concepts of restitution to compensate those wronged by lawbreakers.

In more modern times, two parallel systems have evolved, a criminal court system and a civil court system, as a way of simultaneously ensuring that defendants have a fair trial that reaches a truthful conclusion about guilt or innocence and that victims are properly compensated for the wrong that has been caused them.

● (2335)

The criminal court process is centred on the accused, on attempting to prove a person's guilt on the one hand and ensuring that the guilt has not been wrongly attributed on the other. The victim has had an increasing role in the criminal justice process but is admittedly not the centre of it.

However, the victim is very much at the centre of the civil proceedings process when he or she seeks damages for the harm that he or she has suffered. The main difference between the two systems, of course, is that the burden of proof is higher in criminal court. It is thus possible for someone to be acquitted in criminal court but to be found guilty in a civil case and consequently be forced to pay damages to the victim even though criminal guilt was not found.

What remains to be seen in reference to the victims bill of rights is whether it makes either court process any more responsive to the needs of victims in any real way or alternatively whether it merely tinkers with one or both. Essentially, what we are looking at is more in the nature of a placebo bill.

The justice minister says he is putting victims at the heart of the justice system, but is he really? Again, the current victims rights ombudsman thinks not, while the former victims rights ombudsman gave the bill a D grade when it was released. Or has the minister merely raised victims' expectations to a level that will lead to disappointment and frustration? According to Dr. Lori Triano-Antidormi, a psychologist who works with victims and their families and a victim herself who lost a loved one to a terrible crime, the government is creating false hopes.

Earlier in this debate, my esteemed colleague from Mount Royal outlined steps Liberals have taken to help victims. For example, the Martin government facilitated the testimony of child victims and other vulnerable witnesses by providing for the more widespread use of testimonial aids and support persons. That government also enhanced the national DNA databank by authorizing judges to order DNA samples from those convicted of a number of serious crimes.

A key concern for victims of crime surrounds plea bargains. I am sure everyone here is aware of that. Many victims are deeply frustrated when a plea bargain allows an accused who has done great harm to plead guilty to a lesser charge. In one case I read about, a plea bargain was arranged for someone who had killed an individual's son. However, the charge was reduced from second degree murder to manslaughter, resulting in a lesser sentence. The mother of the victim says she could not abide by the plea bargain because it meant that the man who killed her son would not truly be considered a murderer in the eyes of the community. He would in effect be viewed as someone who got caught up in some unfortunate chaotic situation and killed without intent to do so. When she was told of the plea bargain, the mother of the victim said:

> I want you to let him go then. He's a murderer. Let the murderer go. Don't charge him with manslaughter because his whole life is going to be, “Oh, you poor guy, you were put in a position where you had to take a man's life.” I would rather him be out walking the street than put in jail for manslaughter.

This quote shows the extent of this woman's anger and bitterness. What added to the bitterness, the insult to injury, was the fact that the judge was never told of her opposition to the plea bargain. If he had, she may have found some small but transformative comfort in the fact that she had had her say.

A different case illustrates how giving victims the opportunity to express themselves over a plea bargain can help them in the difficult healing process, even if at the end of the day they do not succeed in changing a judge's ultimate decision.

In a case in Manitoba, the fiancée of a man who had been stomped to death by a group of teenagers at an outdoor festival was given the opportunity to express her opposition to the plea bargain. This had a profound positive long-term impact on the woman's healing process. The fiancée was obviously shattered by the judge's decision to accept the plea bargain, but she had been able to express her devastating disappointment to the prosecutor who communicated it to the judge.

● (2340)

To quote the judge:

> The Crown said very honestly, 'The victim is not happy; she would wish you not go along with it,'....
>
> When court was over, I walked over to her—I was in my robes—and we shared a tear together. About two months later, I got a letter.... It said that even though she... still did not agree with it, she said...what had happened in court had changed her life around. She had gone back to school and was now helping...victims, and wanted to thank me.

We obviously cannot give victims a veto over plea bargains or other decisions in criminal court cases. However, this bill would not even allow victims to have a say. It would merely give them the right to be informed of a plea bargain, and then only if they ask.

In contrast, the U.S. Crime Victims' Rights Act gives victims the right to address every public proceeding, including those relating to pleas. It gives victims standing in court, allowing them to hire lawyers to represent them. According to one expert, victims in the U. S. express greater satisfaction with the justice system when they feel they have been heard, something borne out by the Manitoba example I just referenced.

Bill C-32 also addresses, or attempts to address, the matter of restitution. However, again, the advertised message from the government does not quite match the facts. The bill would allow victims to ask the courts to consider imposing a restitution order against the offender, where financial losses are easy to calculate. The bill would leave it to victims to enforce restitution orders against wrongdoers.

In any event, what we know is that often, when restitution is demanded and granted, the offender is not in a position to pay. No doubt that creates a certain level of frustration and disappointment in the system on behalf of the victims.

The bill is a step in the right direction. One has to wonder if it could not have been a bit bolder in terms of helping victims. I am sure there will be some very good and interesting discussion around issues such as those I have raised, when the bill goes to committee.

● (2345)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis for his speech.

We have long been part of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security together, where we have studied many private members' bills or other bills about victims' rights. Ms. O'Sullivan, the ombudsman for victims, often came to testify and we had the opportunity to ask her many questions.

In fact, my question is about the services currently being offered to victims. The NDP will be supporting the bill at second reading so that the Canadian victims bill of rights, proposed by the government opposite, can be studied in committee.

I, too, am worried about victims' rights. Sue O'Sullivan, like many other witnesses who came to talk to us about victims' rights, spoke about the importance of prevention so as to avoid creating more victims in Canada.

Could my colleague talk some more about how important prevention is and how it should be a key element in the Canadian victims bill of rights?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, in reading some of Ms. O'Sullivan's material, I learned that she had made 30 recommendations to the government and that only half of them were accepted.

With respect to prevention, I am not sure I really understand what aspect of prevention this is about. Is it about society in general? I think that is what my colleague was referring to. I strongly believe in prevention, particularly when it comes to helping youth.

When a young person gets help and ends up not embarking on a life of crime, that does not make headlines. Headlines are for people who commit crimes. Prevention saves a lot of lives, and there are plenty of examples of that. Unfortunately, we cannot talk about it very much tonight, but I really believe in it.

● (2350)

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his well-thought-out speech. I was really pleased to see that the Liberals support the need for this victims bill of rights and its underlying principles, though I am a bit puzzled as to why they did not take any action on this while they were in government.

Does the member agree that the victims bill of rights should have been accompanied by the funding necessary to provide for implementation of the complaints mechanism it provides and also funding to provide actual support for the victims?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member's first point, I am sure she understands that society evolves, ideas evolve, and steps are taken in a progressive way over time. We did not have a victims bill of rights 100 years ago either. Things take time to evolve.

As I mentioned in my speech, the Liberals did bring in a number of important measures to help victims. For example, the Martin government took measures to facilitate the testimony of child victims and other vulnerable witnesses by providing for the more widespread use of testimonial aids and support persons.

On the question of funding, I hope that the government will bring in more funding. I understand that the budget has to follow the passage of the legislation, but I am not confident that the Conservatives will bring in funding. It seems to have become a habit of the current government to create wonderful gestures but not back them up with the resources required for those gestures to become meaningful. When it comes, for example, to the complaints process, the Conservatives have been very vague. If victims find that their rights are not being respected, we are not absolutely certain what they can do about it. This could be problematic down the road.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sometimes there is nothing more slippery than a Liberal. In this case, they are trying to defend their record of years of inaction on victims' rights. We have Liberals who did absolutely nothing on victims' rights for years, and now we have Conservatives who are basically doing something that is called tokenism.

The thing is that they cannot address victims' rights if they do not address funding programs and do not address trying to deal with prevention. How difficult is it to wrap their heads around the fact that they have to invest in prevention and invest in programs that allow victims to have a voice? The current government is not doing this, and the past Liberal governments did not do it.

I do not understand how my colleague can try to defend the Liberals' record by trying to squeeze out in the middle. I have tremendous respect for my Liberal colleague, just not for his government in the past. I would like to hear whether he can defend the Liberal record on victims' rights.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my hon. colleague as well, but I must tell him that I have been here for almost 10 years now, and I only started hearing the NDP talk about victims' rights in the last year or so.

He is right that funding is important. Codified rights are important as well. When the Liberals brought in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, they did not bring in a Charter of Rights and Freedoms budget at the same time, but those rights matter.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot to say and a lot of questions for the Liberals. However, I will stick to the facts and set the record straight.

The NDP has always supported victims' rights, and I think that is important to point out. I do not think that anyone in the House is against victims' rights. I think the problem is in how it is all implemented. The problem is in choosing words carefully, ensuring fundamental rights are taken into account, having respect for the dignity of these people and making sure that we keep our promises, like the one made by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister of Canada's website talks about the right to restitution and promises funding. We are talking about funding directly for the Canadian victims bill of rights. In light of the Prime Minister's promise, what does my colleague think about the fact that there is no mention of funding or an envelope for this bill of rights?

● (2355)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, the government has still not committed to providing the financial means needed to make this bill effective. I agree with the member.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time.

I have the honour of adding my voice to those of my many colleagues today with regard to Bill C-32, introduced by the government opposite, to enact a Canadian victims bill of rights.

As far as this Canadian victims bill of rights is concerned, I would like to mention that the NDP has always supported victims rights. We want to support victims of crime in a tangible way and we must ensure that this charter will not be just a statement in principle that will never be implemented. The NDP sincerely believes that victims should have access to support and assistance programs throughout the legal process.

I mentioned at the start that we will be supporting this bill at second reading. However, on this side of the House, we are not prepared to give the Conservatives a blank cheque. The NDP members have promised to thoroughly study this Canadian victims bill of rights. We want to carefully study it to ensure that it brings about real improvements for victims who have been calling for this bill of rights for many years. We want to give careful consideration to every clause of this bill and we will consult experts about every element of this bill.

I must also mention the incredible work done in committee by my colleagues from Gatineau and La Pointe-de-l'Île, as well as their serious approach to studying Bill C-32 and many other bills brought before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

There are a number of points that I would like to address in the rest of my speech, including the limitations of the charter and some quotes from many victims advocacy groups in Canada. I will come back to that later.

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member will have about eight minutes left to conclude her remarks.

It being 12 a.m., pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, May 27, the House stands adjourned until later this day, at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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