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Monday, November 24, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 24, 2014

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

(On the Order: Private Members' Business)

April 4, 2014—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of Bill C-585, An Act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act (period of residence)—Mr. Corneliu Chisu

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East is not present to move the motion for second reading of Bill C-585, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act (period of residence), as announced in today's notice paper. Pursuant to Standing Order 94, since this is the second time that this item is dealt with on the dates published by the order of precedence, the bill will be dropped from the order paper.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands suspended until 12:04 p.m.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:04 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURAL GROWTH ACT

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC) moved that Bill C-18, An Act to amend certain Acts relating to agriculture and agri-food, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I am pleased to be speaking to Bill C-18, the agricultural growth act, which is now at third reading. Bill C-18 is a vital piece of legislation for Canada's agricultural sector. This bill contains amendments that make it clearer and more robust.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food heard from more than 50 witnesses representing many areas of Canada's agricultural sector. I would like to thank those who came to testify and shared their experience, expertise and recommendations.

Agriculture is a sector of the economy that is growing throughout Canada and around the world. A recent report by Farm Credit Canada stated that the agricultural sector accounts for 30% of Canada's gross domestic product, and only one other sector contributes more to our country's economic growth.

In addition, thanks to our Conservative government policies, farmers have improved their situation and are prospering. According to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, net cash income for farmers is projected to total approximately \$13 billion. That is the highest it has been in nearly 40 years. Average net worth per farm is expected to reach an all-time high of \$2 million this year.

The fact that the Canadian economy has posted some of the best results among G7 countries following the global financial crisis, in terms of both production and job creation, is due in large part to agriculture.

Our Conservative government is clearly working very hard to support Canadian farmers. We are proposing legislation to strengthen the industry.

[*English*]

It is important to note that, last June, the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry issued a report entitled, "Innovation in Agriculture: The Key to Feeding a Growing Population". Recommendation 8 of that report states the following:

The Committee recommends that Agriculture and Agri-food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency bring the Plant Breeders' Rights Act...up to the standards of the 1991 Act of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants.

Bill C-18, with the amendments, supports this recommendation and will spur agricultural innovation within Canada. I would like to briefly mention the amendments that our government brought forward to strengthen Bill C-18, all of which were passed at the agricultural committee.

Government Orders

Based on discussions that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food had with a number of stakeholders, we have amended the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act to provide clarity on key aspects of the bill. We have also amended some wording in translation to ensure clearer understanding of certain clauses in the bill.

However, I want to focus my remarks on the most important part of the bill, the plant breeders' rights.

[*Translation*]

Most of my comments are for the NDP, which has taken a clear stand against Bill C-18. What really bothers me is that farmers in NDP ridings in Quebec want their MPs to support the bill, but the NDP is refusing to do so.

I will have more to say about that later in my speech, but I just want to say that farmers, the organizations that represent them and various stakeholders across Canada strongly support our Agricultural Growth Act because it will stimulate investment in developing new crop varieties and innovation in the sector.

[*English*]

Ms. Patty Townsend, CEO, Canadian Seed Trade Association, said at committee:

...if farmers are going to save grain to use as seed on their farms, they need to store it, so we were really happy to hear the minister say that they are going to propose an amendment to clarify that.

This amendment ensures that seed variety breeders will see a return on their investment and includes, within the farmer's privilege, the right to store seed and to reserve harvested grain to use as seed for planting in subsequent seasons.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

At second reading of Bill C-18, the NDP member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord actually talked about that in the House. He said:

One of the benefits of this bill is that variety developers would be able to see a return on investment for their plant breeding research efforts, providing incentives for an important sector of Canadian agribusiness.

That is why I do not understand how that NDP MP and his colleagues can vote against this bill. The member did not even stop there. He went on to say that the bill would give farmers the right to save conditioned seed for use on their own farms. It would promote access for Canadian farmers to the results of private breeding research in Canada and other countries through more effective intellectual property rights.

Once again, it is clear that the NDP is turning its back on farmers and the party knows it.

During that same debate, the NDP MP for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine said that changes to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act and Canada's decision to sign the 1991 UPOV convention were good.

When the committee studied Bill C-18, the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, who is the NDP's deputy agriculture critic, said that the official opposition agreed with several parts of this bill and, having consulted the industry, believed it was good.

[*English*]

While at committee, as I mentioned earlier, we heard from over 50 witnesses from across the agricultural sector. We heard almost unanimous support for Bill C-18, and based upon comments from the NDP, one would say that it agreed with these witnesses. Instead, the NDP has sadly relied upon its friends from the NFU to dictate NDP agricultural policy.

I have said it before, it is a shame when a political party does not listen to the farmers within the ridings and throughout Canada.

The agricultural growth act strengthens intellectual property rights for plant breeders so that Canada can finally adopt and implement UPOV '91. Among the witnesses, we heard from Mr. William Van Tassel, first vice-president of the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec, who said that the federation is in favour of the changes through which the plant breeders' rights would comply with UPOV '91.

Canada's current legislation meets the requirements for UPOV '78. Since then, there have been several updates to the UPOV requirements for plant breeders' rights protections. Significant innovation in agriculture and in plant variety technology has happened since then. Today, Canada remains one of only two UPOV members from developed countries with legislation that does not comply with UPOV '91. This puts our Canadian breeders and farmers at a competitive disadvantage.

Agricultural industry, farmers across Canada, and plant breeders all agree that it is time to reinvigorate investment, innovation, and growth in our agricultural sector.

[*Translation*]

Even the NDP member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, who spoke to Bill C-18, told the House that all these important changes address the concerns raised by her constituents.

Unfortunately, when the House of Commons voted on agricultural innovation last week, that member and all of her NDP colleagues voted against the government, against farmers all across Canada and even against the member's own constituents, even though she said herself that the bill addresses the concerns of those constituents.

During the hearings of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, Gary Stanford, a farmer and president of the Grain Growers of Canada, spoke in favour of Bill C-18. He echoed that sentiment in early November when he represented Canadian farmers at the global grain conference.

Government Orders

Gary Stanford wants farmers to know that Bill C-18 contains important and positive changes. He also wants to set the record straight about what UPOV '91 really means. In an article published in *Real Agriculture*, he said that Canada is one of only a handful of countries not covered under UPOV '91. Aligning our regulations will not only level the playing field for our producers, but it is also expected to encourage foreign breeders to release their varieties in Canada. This would give our farmers access to new varieties their competitors are already using. The bill also enshrines into law the farmers' right to save seed, as they do now.

• (1210)

Mr. Stanford's organization is part of a general industry group called Partners in Innovation that strongly supports Bill C-18. This group is a coalition of 20 agricultural organizations representing the majority of farmers in Canada, including the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec, which can be found in all regions of Quebec and includes unions that represent over 10,000 farmers.

[English]

With Bill C-18, we are taking the necessary steps to align the Plant Breeders' Rights Act with UPOV '91. UPOV '91 allows countries to entrench the right of farmers to save, clean, store, and use seed for their own operations. Mr. Doug Chorney, president of Manitoba's Keystone Agricultural Producers, also offered his support at committee, stating:

The changes to the act will bring Canada into compliance with UPOV 91, the international agreement for protecting intellectual property of plant breeders. It is anticipated that this will pave the way for increased investment in crop variety development.

The member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, the member for Sudbury, and the member for Timmins—James Bay all mentioned in this House, when speaking to Bill C-18, some of the benefits foreign research can have for Canadian farmers and plant breeders. Mr. Rick White, CEO of the Canadian Canola Growers Association, told the committee:

Additionally, Bill C-18 allows for the recognition of foreign data and reviews for new feed, seed, and fertilizer registrations. This should streamline the registration process, making it easier to bring new products to Canada while still maintaining high levels of safety.

Mr. White was not alone in supporting foreign data. Other witnesses spoke in favour of this.

If experts in the agricultural industries speak in favour of foreign data and information, and NDP members have said the same, why would they vote against Bill C-18? The New Democrats claim that they held consultations with stakeholders, but they clearly ignored the expert testimony of many agricultural stakeholders. The NDP stakeholder is the NFU. It always has been and it always will be. Farmers in Quebec and across Canada cannot trust their future livelihoods to the NDP because a clear majority of agriculture is not aligned with the NFU.

[Translation]

Farmers in NDP ridings in Quebec support Bill C-18, so how will the NDP explain to them that it ignored their opinion and voted against Bill C-18? It is a real shame to see a political party disregard the needs of its stakeholders and its voters.

Unlike the NDP, our government meets with all the stakeholders in the farming sector across Canada and holds consultations with them. The Minister of Agriculture had the opportunity to speak to stakeholders from Canada's farming sector about the many provisions of the bill, including those regarding compliance with UPOV '91.

We received some good ideas on how to make the bill clearer and improve the wording, and we followed through on those ideas. The farmers wanted Canada to adhere to UPOV '91, and that is what our government is working towards.

The Putting Farmers First report has been our guiding principle since the day we came to power. This bill's support for competitiveness is a significant and tangible way of showing our commitment.

• (1215)

[English]

Bill C-18 would give Canadian producers a competitive edge. This includes our innovative horticultural and fruit and vegetable growers. The horticulture industry is an incredibly diverse industry, with 120 different commodities. Statistics Canada is reporting that Canadian fruit and vegetable farmers sold \$4.3 billion worth of produce in 2013. This is up 5.4% from 2012. The ornamental horticulture sector on its own represents over \$14 billion in economic impact.

Mr. Victor Santacruz, executive director of the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association, said:

Our position is that we support the changes to the plant breeders' rights in the adoption of UPOV 91. Canada's ornamental horticulture sector was in a competitive disadvantage by being on UPOV 78, and we are pleased with the decision to move this forward. This will place our sector on a level playing field with our trading partners, such as the U.S., the U.K., Germany, and the Netherlands.

Access to new varieties and the ability to protect Canadian new varieties abroad is important to the competitiveness of our sector.

Bill C-18 is also good news for Canada's economy, which depends on the agriculture and food sector for over 8% of our GDP and for one in eight jobs. One of our government's main priorities is to promote agriculture within Canada and around the world.

During the many consultations with stakeholders our government had, we announced in 2013 an agreement on the Canada-EU free trade agreement. Last week, in this House, we debated the benefits the Canada-EU free trade agreement would have for Canada's agriculture industry. Once again, I worry that the NDP MPs will fail our farmers by voting against the adoption of the Canada-EU free trade agreement.

Government Orders

Our Conservative government listens to farmers across Canada. We make decisions, based on these consultations, that farmers want, such as increasing our strategic federal-provincial-territorial investments under Growing Forward 2 by 50% for market development, innovation, and competitiveness.

[*Translation*]

Farmers want to be competitive and use innovative technologies to improve their business. Bill C-18 deals in part with science, technology and innovation in the farming sector. Innovation is what the farming sector needs for a profitable and sustainable future.

In Canada in particular, an innovative farming and food industry is a powerful driver of our economy. In fact, it generates more than \$54 billion in farm cash receipts; it employs 2.1 million people, which is the equivalent of one in eight jobs; and its exports are worth a record \$43.6 billion.

In Canada, the fruit and vegetable industries and the potato industry contribute tremendously to economic growth. We want that growth to continue.

For that to happen, we must provide farmers with the tools they need to be competitive. We must continue to promote the strength of our farming industry and create favourable conditions for its continued growth. That is the goal of this bill.

[*English*]

Bill C-18 would strengthen intellectual property rights for plant breeders and would help increase investment in research and development for Canada's crop sector. That would help farmers remain competitive by providing them with access to the best new crop varieties, whether they are developed in Canada or abroad.

Without a doubt, our government has been working hard to level the playing field and to create new market opportunities for our producers. Bill C-18 could help the crop sector with a strong plant breeding program. Such a program could increase yields in crop varieties, improve their nutritional content and quality, enhance disease resistance, reduce the need for fertilizers and pesticides, and provide a wider selection of plant varieties. Supporting a modern system to make sure that plant breeders are compensated for their efforts and can continue to undertake further improvements is critical to the future of the agricultural sector.

As I have explained, adopting UPOV '91 in Bill C-18 would strengthen intellectual property rights for plant breeders and would help increase investment in research and development for Canada's crop sector.

Canada's farmers grow world-class food in a global marketplace that is ripe with opportunity. Bill C-18 is a key part of our strong agricultural agenda, and it would strengthen Canadian farming. We are ensuring that our legislation reinforces and takes full advantage of modern science and technology, innovation, and international practice in the agriculture industry.

Farmers cannot trust the NDP with the future of their agricultural livelihoods. The NDP simply does not listen to farmers across Canada. They repeatedly rely on the narrow interests of the NFU.

I encourage all MPs, especially the NDP, to vote in favour of Bill C-18. It is a great bill for farmers, a great bill for our agriculture sector, and a great bill for Canada.

● (1220)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy listening to the parliamentary secretary tell us how we should think on this side of the House.

However, he was right on one count. The bill could have been a great bill for farmers. All the Conservatives would have had to do was accept our amendments, which would have actually helped clean up their legislation. In fact, they had to make an amendment in an area we concentrated on, because they got it wrong. We identified very early in the game that they had it wrong. The minister actually said they would have to change that and brought in a series of amendments. It is unlike them to actually bring them forward like that.

The biggest amendment they brought forward was a six-pager, which was a technical piece, that would support the Department of Agriculture in recouping monies from the advance payments program. It was a rather technical piece, so I will not go into the details, but the way the department described it was that it would be like the student loan program. They wanted to mirror that. Well, people who have student loans know how onerous that program is.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is this: When it comes to the case of farmer's privilege, why did the bill still allow for the minister, on a case-by-case basis, to not allow farmers to save particular seeds? On a case-by-case basis, the minister could actually take that right away. Why was that still allowed to be in the bill, even though we proposed that it be taken out?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, there was a lot in that question. First, I was not telling the NDP what to think. I was telling the NDP what farmers and farm organizations are saying about the bill and what farmers in their very own ridings are saying about the bill. I provided numerous quotes, from both NDP MPs and the agriculture industry, showing what an important bill this is for the agriculture sector.

When it comes to the amendments, I want to assure the House that every single amendment was given careful consideration and debate within committee. The committee voted on each and every amendment based on both the debate that took place on that amendment and on the feedback we received from witnesses at committee and from other consultations we had.

He is right that as the government, we brought forward amendments to the bill. They were based on the consultations with the agriculture sector, which I recommend he and his NDP MPs have with the agriculture sector. If they do those consultations, they will hear once again the loud and clear support of farmers and the agriculture and agri-food sector for Bill C-18.

Government Orders

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the parliamentary secretary talk about the bill. There is a lot in the bill that is good. It is a modern bill for agriculture. It is something the government should have started earlier. It has been in power for 10 years, and it has just been getting its head around it in the last year.

The parliamentary secretary beat up the New Democrats because they are voting against his bill, but the critic for the NDP was right in saying that there were witnesses who came forward at committee that wanted changes that the government would not allow. One was with regard to advance payments. The canola growers and the grain growers came forward and said that the advance payments were not enough for the size of farms now and for the amount of money farmers have to borrow and go through in a whole-year cycle. The whole thing about advance payments is that they are there so that the farmer is not forced to sell a product too early in the fall in order to get through.

Also, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association stated that it is very concerned about the penalty structure, whereby the government is becoming like a referee instead of a coach in dealing with helping farmers have safer food and better production.

Those were two items from witnesses that stuck out for me. I would like the parliamentary secretary to comment on those, because he said that the amendments brought forward by the opposition were just not acceptable. Well, some of the amendments we brought forward were right out of the mouths of the witnesses who came forward in committee.

• (1225)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about what the APP program is. The APP program is a financing option, backed by the government, offered to farmers. They can borrow up to \$100,000 interest free and they can borrow up to a maximum of \$400,000. Those are the limits that are in place, and they were raised under this government. We listened to industry and raised those limits just a few years ago.

I want to highlight that the APP is not meant to be the only financing option open to farmers. It is meant to be an option available to farmers and it is an important one. As we discussed in committee and as we discussed one-to-one, the statistics regarding the APP are telling and they are important. Let me just give a few statistics that explain why that amendment was not passed.

Only 2% of farmers who use the APP actually reached, or desired to reach, the \$400,000 threshold. The member said that many farmers would want to borrow a lot more than \$400,000, but only 2%, which is in the historical data, borrow up to \$400,000. We do not see the need being there.

On the first \$100,000, the interest portion, about 66% of farmers seek that first \$100,000. That is clearly an important component of the program, and it is remaining intact.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House a little over a decade. In this last session of Parliament, I have noticed a pattern where opposition members do their homework, bring forward recommendations and amendments to problems they see in a bill, and Conservative members, like

dutiful sock puppets, turn them all down and then accuse the New Democrats of not doing their job. The government ignores every recommendation on bill after bill, which puts it in the position where some of its bills are ruled unconstitutional. The Minister of Justice has a greater recall rate than the Ford Pinto.

The member was asked a question earlier about seed control that previously belonged to farmers being put into the hands of the minister. Farmers have told me that they do not trust that and they have a good reason not to trust it. They want to know why the minister would suddenly have this power to decide what rights they would or would not have. I have not heard the member explain that to us.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member had been on agriculture committee when the bill was reviewed. As I have said, each and every amendment that was put forward by the opposition and by the government were given careful consideration. All the amendments were studied, debated and voted upon. What guided the committee's final decision was the testimony given by witnesses who came to committee and consultations that were held when the bill was tabled in Parliament. I only wish the member could have been there to hear the testimony rather than launching a grenade by saying that it did not work the way he wanted it to work when he was not even there.

Let me talk about the farmers' privilege. Again, the member is relying on one single stakeholder called the NFU, which has these fears. The vast majority of witnesses who came in front of committee said that they liked the provisions contained in the bill. I included many quotes in my speech from the agricultural sector to back up that position. They like the farmers' privilege and the way it is defined. They provided some feedback that was incorporated into an amendment, which was passed by committee and is now incorporated in the bill before the House.

Once again, I appeal to the member and to his colleagues to listen to farmers, review what was said at committee, look at the quotes I have provided in my speech and recognize that the farmers they represent, particularly those in Quebec, strongly support the bill and they do not appreciate the NDP not listening to them. They want NDP MPs to vote in favour of the agricultural growth act, Bill C-18.

• (1230)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always with great pride that I come here to talk about agriculture and farmers.

The parliamentary secretary tried to encapsulate what we did around the bill, how the committee functioned and whether it had great and vigorous debate on amendments. If I were able to dance, it is less than what used to be referred to as the "one-two". Usually, it is a "one and a half" when it comes to debate from the Conservative side. When the Conservatives do not really have any more logical things to say, they just say "no", which is the intent of the debate.

Government Orders

When the Conservatives portray this as some sort of vigorous and spirited debate in this place, one gets used to the hyperbole, embellishment and all of the other things that happen here. The parliamentary secretary is taking somewhat of a poetic license around his descriptor of how the agriculture committee works, except for the fact that, for the most part, it is a pretty genial committee, to be truthful, as far as the tenor.

I would like to thank the chair of the committee, who was very good and generous about ensuring there was a balance of witnesses. When I say that, there was an equal number of witnesses who spoke quite passionately in favour of Bill C-18 as was without amendment. That is even before the government's amendments. On the other side, in equal number, there were many who had a number of amendments to put forward. A few of those amendments were covered by what the government did.

None of them ever thought about the major amendment that the government made, which had to do with the advanced payment process and about recouping money from farmers who went bankrupt. That is why it used the example of the student loan program. It was not actually my narrative or descriptive of how the advanced payment reclaim program would work. It was from the department of Agriculture and Agri-Food. When I specifically asked to have the six pages of amendments to fix this one piece explained, the department told me that it was a very technical piece, but that it was like the student loan program.

For those of us who know young people who have student loans, that conjures up a vision that is not pleasant. I do not know too many student loan recipients who think the program is a great one to be in. They would see it as a very onerous program. That is what the government decided to do. That was its major amendment.

The government's minor tinkering with the farmers' privilege piece did not do the first thing we suggested it ought do. We do not believe it is a privilege for farmers to save seed. We think it is their right to save seed. Some would ask is that not just semantics, or are we not just being wordsmiths? Legislation is about words, and words are important. That is why we spend an exhaustive amount of time, according to the government, talking. It says that we should do more doing and less talking, but carving legislation is about writing the words down, and debating the words and their very meaning.

Fundamentally, the difference between a right and a privilege under the code of law, of which I am not a learned person in the sense of being a lawyer, is the significant difference between one having a right to do something and one having a privilege to actually do it. That is a significant piece that I think the government understood. I think it purposely decided to leave it as a privilege because it intended to do things. At least, it would leave itself with the ability to do things.

One of the things that was mentioned earlier, and my friend from Timmins—James Bay pointed it out, was the minister's ability, on a case by case basis, to change that privilege. My view is that if it were a fundamental right, he would be unable to do it on a case by case basis because he might have to come back to here. We suggested that needed that be struck from the bill and if the government wanted to change things, it could write new legislation and bring it back here.

The government says that it is a bit onerous and that it takes too long. It takes too long for who? For the seed company, of course, the folks who will end up with the ownership of seeds that they wish to sell, because they will say that they have developed it or done something with it and they own that intellectual property, which is understood.

● (1235)

However, if the minister simply allows things to disappear for farmers, where is the balance in that? For us, clearly Bill C-18 was about balancing the needs of those seed developers and the rights of farmers, and ensure that the balance was appropriate and not totally unequal. Those who held the intellectual property would still have greater weight than those who did not. They would have the ability to sell or not, they owned it, and no one else could have it if they had not previously bought it. This became problematic for us, and to be truthful, problematic for most farm organizations across the country. Most said that needed to be changed.

The minister came back with a minor tweak to say that the farmers could now store seed. However, the initial legislation did not say that. It actually said that one could save it, clean it, but not store it. Therefore, what were they going to do with it? If they could not store it, where was it going to go after they saved it? It had to be kept somewhere. It could not be sent to a friend down the road to store it, because that would be a commercial transaction even though no money was exchanged. There is no exchange even for non-monetary purposes in this legislation, and the seed could only be kept for oneself. Therefore, the Conservatives made this minor tweak to enable farmers to store it, and that is all they did under farmers' privilege, even though it was identified by a number of farm groups across the country as needing needed a bit more strength for that particular aspect.

UPOV '91, which is the major piece in this legislation, is the new threshold on intellectual property rights when it comes to seed. There is no question about that, and it is accepted around the world.

UPOV is simply an acronym for intellectual property and '91 signifies the year it came into force with a number of countries, including a previous government here which signed on but never enabled it. This has been around for a long time.

Therefore, there was the issue of getting it done, which had been tried before, but the majority of farmers said that they did not want it, so it was withdrawn. However, the reason it has come forward now is that although farmers are still basically leery of UPOV '91 and what it may hold for them years down the road, there are very few alternatives these days.

Public funding for public research through Agriculture Canada has been on the decline for the last 25 years. However, nearly every farm and farm group will tell us the same thing: they need more money to go back into public research so there is a balance with the privately-held independent companies.

To be truthful, private companies are in the business of making a profit, and that is not a dirty word. Yes, I am a New Democrat, but for private companies, profit is not a dirty word. That is what they are there to do. They provide a product or service and sell it. There is nothing wrong with that.

However, I will be so bold as to say that we take seed to grow crop to make food. It is a simple proposition. Anybody who puts seed in the ground and looks after it well, it will grow. It may be flowers, vegetables or anything. Farmers do exceedingly well in our country and they deserve to have the latest technology and seeds to do that. The problem is this. At what price and are they a captive market?

Our view of this was how to balance it. One way is to protect farmers so they can be empowered in dealing with their competitors so they can withstand the push of, “here's what you're getting and here's the price you're paying”, because they have options. The problem is that the government has limited those options.

Clearly, that was the dilemma we had with the legislation. It was not the fact that a private seed company would own intellectual property under UPOV '91. We did not fundamentally disagree with that at all.

• (1240)

We wanted to see the tables balanced. The Conservatives did not want to see the tables balanced. They have allowed the table to be unevenly balanced because, even on a case-by-case basis, as I said earlier, the ministry has the right to take some things away if it chooses. That, we think, is not the direction to go when farmers are now at the whim of the minister, not Parliament, with the latter now able to say, I do not think they need that.

One of the other amendments we tried to push forward was that the seed companies themselves can now appeal to CFIA not to register the seed. If they do not register it, it means that it is totally private, meaning in turn that the farmer cannot save it, because only the registered varieties can be saved, so now the farmer cannot save it. Not only are the seed companies allowed to lobby the minister to see if he can remove certain privileges, but they also now have the right to ask CFIA not to register a particular variety of seed if they do not want that done. That gives them more power in the marketplace. The fewer the varieties of seed that get registered, the less the ability of farmers to find a competitive price for the seeds they need to buy.

That is why we made amendments. We did not strike the bill. We did not go into committee and say, “Let's eliminate this or let's eliminate that”, and try to wipe it all out. We did not do that at all. We went to committee with the good intention of trying to make a bill that would be acceptable to the seed producers and their intellectual property rights, and for farmers who are the end-users of that particular product. That was our goal at committee.

Unfortunately, my friends on the other side of the table, in government, decided that they we did not need to level it out that well. They believe they know what is best for farmers. We heard that in the House this morning: the parliamentary secretary said that they know best for farmers. However, what he did not say was that when witnesses and farm groups and farmers came here, including the Conservatives' witnesses, or at least ones that we did not call, they said that we needed a substantive amendment. My colleague wants to suggest that there is only one group we spoke to.

One of the amendments came from my discussion with the vice-president of Bayer CropScience AG. Back in February I had a two-hour conversation with the vice-president of Bayer on the phone. We discussed the piece on farmers' privilege and their ability to store it.

Government Orders

When we went through that with him, he said that was not actually what he wanted to see. He wanted to see a more balanced approach to this. That is when we suggested that we would draft an amendment that would give balance, but still protected his company's intellectual property rights if it developed a new variety. It is only fair if they have put the money in and own that property that they have a right to charge for it. That is what UPOV '91 said.

Even the vice-president of Bayer was saying that, yes, he heard us, that we were right and needed to find a balance. To suggest somehow that due diligence was not done on this side of the House by New Democrats and the agriculture critic is a bit facetious, because, quite frankly, it was.

We spoke to other major chemical groups, seed manufacturers, agricultural groups, and individual farmers. In fact, we probably put more effort into Bill C-18 than I have seen since I went on the agriculture committee back in 2008. Why? It is because when the government tabled the bill, it was in such a hurry to do it. It tabled the bill a year ago, I think, and it has languished, so we actually had the ability to go out and talk to people for a long period of time, which was nice. We did exactly that. We talked to experts on intellectual property, who eventually came to the committee and talked about those types of rights, including a lawyer who specializes in agriculture. We had all of that discussion to frame our position so that farmers would get the best deal they possibly could, based on a balanced approach, which is really what we wanted.

What does it mean for farmers and their privilege, and what could it mean? That is the great unknown, because it has all gone back into the hands of the minister rather Parliament. There will a question now as to where the royalties will be in the system. A lot of questions were asked about that. There is a debate as to end-point royalties or beginning royalties. When a farmer buys the seed, they get it there. Some say they would rather pay at the end, because if the seed is not any good, then maybe they will not pay that much money. If the seed is really good, then they will pay a percentage based on the seed that was really good and they got a great crop.

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• (1245)

There is a fundamental debate about that, which should be had by farm groups and farmers, but the dilemma is that it belongs in the hands of the minister. New Democrats hope he will have a conversation with the farm groups, but it is not a sure thing.

Every bill needs a regulatory process, and I accept that. The problem with most of the bills that come before the House is that the government puts all of that and more into its own hands and makes decisions without the House having an opportunity to debate it. Of course, its catch-all phrase is, “Don't worry, we will consult.” Who will consult? The parliamentary secretary says he has a list of folks he likes to consult, and there are folks that New Democrats consult that he obviously does not want to listen to. That is not consultation.

People who both agree and disagree with one's view have to be consulted. In fact, the folks who disagree should be consulted more often than the ones who do, because they challenge one to think more about a particular piece of legislation and how it can be made better. It also hones one's ability to discuss with them and explain why one is going in a certain direction, which allows them to see why one is headed down that road.

However, one can change directions, as New Democrats have done here. We said that we wanted to get the bill to committee to have good discussions, which happened. We had good discussions and brought forward substantive amendments for sure. It is always hard for government to accept substantive amendments, I understand. It was not about taking the bill apart but strengthening it for farmers, the very people whom the parliamentary secretary said the government was there for. The amendments put forward were for farmers, crafted mainly by what farmers told us either at committee or privately in meetings and conversations that have taken place over the last eight months.

The parliamentary secretary says it is only one group that New Democrats listen to. I have a number of letters from rural municipalities in Saskatchewan, not from individuals but councils in rural municipalities, that actually adopted resolutions, not just one but a few. They adopted resolutions that said Bill C-18 should be defeated.

I did not receive these last week but at the beginning of the year during the consultative process. Rural municipalities in Saskatchewan were saying that this is not a good bill for farmers. That was six or seven months ago. They were all saying this in March, early in the process, when copies of those letters were sent to me, the originals having gone to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Therefore, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food was well aware that a number of rural municipalities in Saskatchewan were saying no thanks to Bill C-18—not even as amended as New Democrats proposed. They were saying no, *carte blanche*: “We don't want it, it is not a good bill for farmers”, they said. Yet the parliamentary secretary and the minister would have us believe that everything is rosy in farm country and every farmer in Canada loves what the government is doing. The reality is that this is not true, just as in life one cannot be loved all of the time by everyone—unless, of course, one is Speaker. I know that the Speaker loves all of us all of the time because we are so well behaved.

Clearly, there are diverging viewpoints. With this bill, I actually thought there was enough give and take and room between the government and the opposition to craft a really significant bill for Canadian farmers. Unfortunately, much to my chagrin, as I learn as I get older, I was wrong. I was disappointed by that, but it still does not shake my faith in Canadian farmers.

Canadian farmers really know what they want, they know how to tell us what they want, and I would suggest to my friends on the other side that Canadian farmers will show them what they want during the election in 2015. I suggest that those rural municipalities in Saskatchewan are a bellwether for the members who say they did not want it and are now about to drive it down their throats.

I will make the same appeal to the other side that the parliamentary secretary made to this side. Members representing people who live on the Prairies may want to rethink Bill C-18 when it comes time to be whipped, because, clearly, there are a lot of folks in those ridings who are saying no thanks.

• (1250)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague who has explained the process of this bill.

Unfortunately, it mirrors a pattern that we see in every piece of legislation that comes through this very dysfunctional Parliament, in which there are problematic bills. It does not matter who brings the legislation forward: bills are always problematic; there are always faults within them. A group of adults, a group of mature people, a group of people who are here to represent the best interests of the country can sit down at committee and work through these faults and find common ground.

I know that when I was on the agricultural committee when first elected, it was a committee where all parliamentarians tried to put the interests of farmers, sometimes, but not always, ahead of their own talking points.

I am very interested in the failings of this bill. This is a very large bill, covering all manner of things. There are many good elements in it. However, we have heard consistently about problematic issues that needed to be fixed.

In particular, I am very interested in the issue of farmers' privilege, where the government's idea of representing farmers is to take away rights from them and allow the minister to decide whether or not they have those rights. In this process it is very easy for the large corporate seed lobbyists to just call up the minister, have a meeting, take his staff out for drinks and, lo and behold, the privileges that farmers have enjoyed year after year, decade after decade, can be annulled without any process.

What does my hon. colleague think about this part of the bill that is undermining the fundamental rights of farmers, giving these over to the minister and allowing, again, backroom access by corporate lobbyists to influence seed policy.

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Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Timmins—James Bay sits on other committees, as many of my colleague do, watching how legislation comes about and whether we can enact changes to it or not.

He is right about farmers' privilege. As I said at the beginning of my speech, there is a difference in language and tone and in how we believe that farmers have a right to save seed versus their belief it is a privilege.

When we raise that with members on the government side, they say that it is the same. Our view is that it is not the same, that there is a significant difference between a privilege and a right. That became abundantly clear when we were going through the legislation. We can see the powers that the minister takes into his own hands when deciding a farmers' privilege on a case-by-case basis. The minister can eliminate some of the privilege of an individual farmer or a group of a farmers. He can say to them that they cannot have that privilege of saving that anymore, because he has decided against it.

It is arbitrary in my view. In our view, that was never the intention of the legislation. At least in civil court, and other areas, and even in the Criminal Code, when taking away someone's right of freedom and sending them to jail, there is due process. This does not give due process. It simply says "By fiat, I am the minister and I am eliminating this particular privilege."

Even more draconian, the other side of it is that the seed company can now come to the minister on a case-by-case basis and say "Do not register that one. I do not want it registered." Registration means that when they move on to something else, that may still be out in the marketplace for farmers to have. If all the seed companies make valid arguments and decide against this on a case-by-case basis, it eliminates farmers' ability to have a competitive marketplace,

If the decision is to not register, we will be in a lot of trouble. What will happen is that they will now own all of it. It will not be open, because the registration will be held by the company itself rather than being registered through CFIA. That will be extremely problematic.

I will guarantee that just as sun rises tomorrow morning, they will ask, on a case-by-case basis, to keep that private and not to register certain varieties of seeds as we move forward.

• (1255)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to commend the member for Welland on the work he does on the agriculture committee, as well as in his riding. In his area, which has probably one of the richest soils in Canada, there are a lot of good, productive farmers. The member for Kings—Hants says that they have better wine and better soil, but that is not for debate today.

This whole bill has so much in it. However, it seems that the debate is focused mostly on UPOV and the whole thing about seeds. That is important, but there is so much else in this bill that it is disappointing to me that we do not talk enough about it.

My question is for the NDP. What if this bill were broken up? I ask because that is what happens in the House, where the Conservatives jam everything together. What if this part on the whole issue on seeds and breeders' rights were a separate bill?

What is the member's opinion on the rest of the bill? Would he agree that the rest of the bill is good for farmers overall and that the NDP members would have voted for it if it were a separate issue?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague from the agriculture committee.

This is an omnibus bill, as I maybe should have stated from the beginning, and there are a number of pieces in it. There are things under the Fertilizers Act and things under the advanced payment program, and there are a number of other things in the bill that we New Democrats fundamentally agree with, so my recommendation for my colleagues would have been a totally different one if the bill had been split.

We brought forward the advance payments program, even though the government had to make a major amendment to it, and justifiably so. It was probably the correct amendment, and we actually voted with the Conservatives on it. We would have voted for the advance payments program. It is what farmers actually wanted. The Conservatives heard farmers on that one. I will give them that. That is what we heard from farmers. There were a couple of other bigger groups that wanted an increase in the amount of money, but basically they heard them. On the Fertilizers Act, we would have voted for that one as well. There are big pieces of this bill on which we are in agreement. That is what farmers were saying, and that is what we heard from our witnesses as well.

However, the fundamental piece on which there was the most concern was the Plant Breeders' Rights Act, because that is about intellectual property. It is about who owns the intellectual property of a seed, which is the very life of a plant. That is the beginning of life for a plant. I do not mean to overdo it, but it is. We can buy seeds at Canadian Tire and grow carrots if we want. I would offer up to all of those who have never taken an opportunity to plant a seed and see something grow that they should do that.

Clearly, they want to own the very essence of a plant: the seed. They have won the day on that. The issue was how we balance it out to ensure that both parties who are involved in growing food for us as a nation are on a level playing field. Unfortunately, in this case the big companies won and the farmers, in my view, did not.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue this discussion, but from the point of view of the consumer.

I live in an urban riding. I have a very popular farmers' market, Atwater Market, in my riding, and I do a lot of my shopping at Jean-Talon Market, which is the biggest farmers' market in Montreal. Many consumers, especially urban consumers, are looking to begin a process of sourcing by buying organic and ensuring they are supporting local producers.

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With this section on seed control, for lack of a better way of putting it, how are consumers going to be able to track where their food comes from, as the provisions in this act would narrow the availability of seed sources?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the question; it is actually a very good one.

The organic association, to use an example, had real concerns about what this meant to their members. What we have seen when large corporations do things is that, justifiably, they do them to scale. They do them on a very large scale, and they do very limited numbers because those become the most profitable ones, and so they should. Why would they market something that is less profitable when they can market something that is more profitable? Their shareholders are looking for their company to be more profitable. That is the impact that consumers will see: less choice in the marketplace in the future.

The organic association is not so much concerned that their seeds will necessarily get commingled. It is more that folks now in the seed business may get out of the business because there will be less return through it and they should actually be in something else. There is a big concern that they will see a kind of homogenization and have fewer choices than exist now. There are those who believe the choices could still be there, but it remains to be seen.

Therefore, there is an impact for consumers down the road, and it will not necessarily be a positive one.

● (1300)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is great to stand in the House today to talk about Bill C-18. For many of the listeners out there, if they are from the farming community or they just like food and are trying to figure out what is in Bill C-18, I am going to do a little more explaining in the next 20 minutes about the bill and about some of the things that I and the Liberals had a problem with, as well as some of the things we agreed with.

The bill would amend nine separate pieces of agriculture-related legislation affecting plant breeders' rights as well as feed, seed, fertilizer, animal health, plant protection, monetary penalties, agriculture marketing programs, and farm debt mediation. There is a lot in the bill. That is why we are saying it is an omnibus bill. It would have been helpful if, in the 10 years the Conservatives were in power, they could have done some of this beforehand and perhaps split some of this up so that we could have had meaningful legislation.

However, that being said, there is a lot in this bill, and it is needed. The bill is needed. It is needed for today's modern agriculture and for our farms and our food industry. It largely appears that the bill attempts to streamline regulatory processes affecting farmers and the agriculture industry more broadly.

Bill C-18 would amend the Plant Breeders' Rights Act to amend certain aspects of the plant breeders' rights granted under the act, including the duration and the scope of those rights and the conditions for the protection of those rights. It would also provide for exceptions in the applications of those rights. That sounds complicated, but that is where it is.

It would amend the Feeds Act, the Fertilizers Act, the Seeds Act, the Health of Animals Act, and the Plant Protection Act. A lot of different acts would be affected by this one bill.

It would authorize inspectors to order that certain unlawful imports be removed from Canada or destroyed. If a P.E.I. farmer, for example, bought some diseased seed potatoes from another country, we would want to be able to destroy that product. The member from P.E.I. would understand this, because he was a seed producer before. That is one part of it.

It would authorize the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to take into account information available from a review conducted by the government of a foreign state when he or she considers that applicable. For instance, let us say we were looking at a product that was good for our farms. Let us say it was an organic product, for instance. If a peer review was done in Europe or in the United States and our farmers needed it, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food could use that information as he or she sees fit. That is another good part in the bill.

It would require that a registration or a licence be obtained for conducting certain activities with respect to certain feeds, fertilizers, and supplements that have to be imported for sale. We have seen this problem recently with the hog industry. Some supplements were coming in that were questionable. Through this bill, we would have legislation that would allow the minister to intervene if something was brought in as a supplement that was not suitable for our industry.

It would also amend the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act. Among other things, it would increase the maximum limits of penalties that could be imposed for certain violations. I will talk about this aspect later, since we have a little problem with this one. As I said in my some of my questioning of the government, even the Cattlemen's Association has a problem with how this whole penalty and violations business would really change the CFIA's role to being more of a referee than a coach. When I was in farming, when the CFIA inspector would come, many times it would help us improve our productivity and help us to have a better product.

I see some of where the Conservatives are going with this part of the bill. It is a bit more about having big penalties and hitting the farmers with them, or anybody producing food, instead of helping them produce a better product and a safer product. Therefore, we have a bit of a problem with that one.

Bill C-18 would amend the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act to modernize the requirements of the advance payments program in an effort to improve accessibility and enhance its administration and delivery. I will talk about that later. There are quite a few changes in that area. Overall, they are pretty good. The amounts could have been increased, but I think some of the other changes are really applicable to today's farming.

● (1305)

As I go through this, listeners out there will find that there are many parts of this bill that the Liberal Party agrees with and want to move forward and that there are some parts we have some problems with.

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The bill would amend the Farm Debt Mediation Act to clarify the farm debt mediation process and to facilitate participation of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food in the mediation process when that minister is the guarantor of a farm debt. In this way, the minister could have some discretion in the mediation process.

As members can see from the many amendments, this omnibus bill has caused some concerns among farmers because there is so much in there to digest and because the repercussions are big. Therefore, we must carefully investigate each of these acts that would be affected. I believe it is important to give people a look at exactly what changes would be made. I figure my best role in my 20 minutes here this morning is to tell people exactly what is in the bill, especially if they are in the food business, so that they have a better understanding.

One of my concerns as the Liberal agriculture critic is the sheer scope of what is being dealt with in this omnibus legislation. The more broadly based the proposed changes are—and in this case, they cross into many areas and many regulatory issues and industry standards—the more difficult it is for people to get their heads around all of it. We have seen that the government has a tendency to just push all this stuff through. It could have been done a little differently and a bit better. We, the opposition on this side, could have helped the Conservatives, but I think it might have hurt their pride, because they had a problem accepting any of the amendments from this side. If any party that is in power really wants to make Parliament work, it would accept ideas from other parties to make the legislation better and to have a made-in-Canada approach. We do not see that happen very much here.

I would also like to highlight more details of some of the other aspects in this bill. One that has been brought up and is the most contentious is the Plant Breeders' Rights Act. Anybody who is listening for the first time would probably wonder what we are talking about in the House of Commons today, but there need to be some changes in this area. If we are to compete with the rest of the modernized world or the western countries that are producing a lot of food, it is only fitting that we have a new system in place.

The old UPOV '78 was just not what it should have been. We needed a more modern approach, and that is what UPOV '91 is. It puts us up there with the other big producers of food and seeds around the world and it helps our farmers. However, there were some problems with it, and we put amendments forward.

It is quite a step for Canadian farmers. We had many witnesses who came forward on both sides of this issue. Smaller growers, organic growers, or growers who just had certain seeds or certain varieties that were unique to a region or an area were worried that they might lose that variety or that somebody might technically steal it. I think some of what is in the bill would protect them.

There was also a lot of opportunity pointed out during committee. We heard from landscapers and horticultural people. Other groups came forward and said that if growers or plant breeders came out with a certain variety of grain that grew well in Quebec, it might grow well in some Scandinavian countries too, so they could be selling that seed someday, and this system would help. The landscapers and horticultural people talked about how they could come up with varieties of roses in Canada, which I think they are

doing right now, that they could sell to the northern United States as well as other places. They wanted to know if they would be protected.

There is a lot in this bill. It is a modernization, but I think we could have done both. We could have had a modern bill for plant breeders and farmers, but we also could have put a little more teeth into the protection of small farmers so that they would not be faced with court decisions and the like to protect their seeds. There were some amendments, but I do not think they went far enough.

● (1310)

The bill also proposes that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency be authorized to consider foreign reviews, which I mentioned already. That is a good thing.

The bill also speaks to licensing and registration. It would increase monetary penalties for violations and provide stronger controls at the border for agriculture products. That is key, because what happens at our borders is important. I was talking to some farmers this morning who are associated with Chicken Farmers of Canada. Chicken is coming into Canada that is not supposed to come into this country. We need stronger controls at our border to check on what is coming in, not only to protect our farmers, but to make sure that a product is safe. Having stronger controls at the border for agricultural products is also a good thing.

The bill would also amend the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act and the Farm Debt Mediation Act. Some of the proposals relate to the delivery and ease of the advanced payments program for producers. There is quite a bit in the bill with respect to that. Most of the debate on this legislation has been about the limit. The Canadian Canola Growers Association mentioned that the limit, which is how much farmers can borrow, is too small.

The advanced payment program was set up by the Liberals many years ago. Let me explain what this program is about. As a result of a farmer spending a lot of money in the spring to harvest a crop, that farmer might need money in the fall, and that is where the advanced payment program comes into play. Farmers sometimes sell their crop too quickly just to get some cash flow. The advanced payment program was set up to help farmers with their cash flow. Of course, any amount that they received they would have to pay back, and 99% of all farmers do pay it back. It is a really good program. Most farmers are honest and they work hard, and they do pay back any money that they receive. They might have a crop failure or various things could happen, but they do manage to pay it back. That is what the program is all about.

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The Canadian Canola Growers Association told us that a limit of \$400,000 was not enough. It suggested that the limit should be \$600,000, taking into account the size of many farms today. I recently visited Manitoba, and the amount of investment that farmers have put into their farm operations is unbelievable, whether it is on machinery or something else. We have to take into account how much money needs to be available.

Other changes in the legislation are with respect to the delivery of the advanced payment program and making it easier to deliver to farmers. The bill would allow for multi-year advanced guarantee repayment agreements upon delivery. In other words, the bill would make it more flexible. For instance, if a farmer cannot sell a product within one year, multi-year payments could apply. A farmer could face a disaster and be forced to wait for over a year to sell a product. This is a big part of the legislation.

I would like to go back to where we were with the plant breeders and some of the things that the Liberal Party wanted to include in this legislation.

Some farmers are worried about being limited in the right to save their seeds. This is where the language of the bill comes into play. The legislation talks about the right to save, reuse, exchange, and sell seeds. The Liberals proposed an amendment to this part of the bill. One of the things that really struck us first, and something that a lot of farmers are concerned about, and I can understand why, is that under this legislation saving seed would be considered a privilege. That wording did not sit right with a lot of people, especially farmers. Privilege means that someone could take seeds away from a farmer. It is like having a licence taken away at any time. That set this part of the bill on the wrong foot right off the bat. The Liberal Party pushed for it to be considered a right rather than a privilege, thereby allowing farmers to have that right. When it is considered a right, they are innocent until proven guilty, but if it is considered a privilege, it would seem to be the other way around.

We tried to get more clarification. The government did change the wording a bit, but we were hoping that it would have been a bit stronger and provide more protection to farmers. That did not happen, so we had to move on.

The bill would increase the areas along the value chain and within the seed reproduction chain where plant breeders can collect royalties.

• (1315)

At the end of the day, it was not that the farmers were concerned. The biggest concern they have is that they buy the registered seed, and they should pay a premium if it is really good seed. However, when they take that seed and grow a crop out of it, as farmers, they might say that was a good seed and they would like to use some of it next year. That should be allowed for in the bill. It is stated in the bill now that they are allowed to do that, but it was a big concern.

Plant breeders who come up with this good grain, from which it took years to make the seed, would want their royalties from it, like anybody else who produces a product. As long as that farmer was not going to sell the seed, they would not be penalized. However, the language was vague and we wanted to strengthen it. We got some of

that, but it was not exactly where we wanted to go with the whole thing.

There is another part of this bill where the CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, has a stronger role in dealing with products. The CFIA intends to utilize our bill to develop regulations, setting conditions around farm-saved seed and compulsory licensing that must continue and engage a farm commodity.

I would like to explore the amendments to the Agricultural Products Marketing Act and the advanced payment program in Bill C-18. We are going to move on from the Seeds Act to the marketing act. Many of the specifics are yet to be determined, but the Canadian Federation of Agriculture has been working with the government, and it sees the merit of a lot of these changes.

I will list some of the key amendments to the marketing products act and the advanced payment program. They are as follows:

Program administrators will now have the ability to provide advances on any commodity and in any region, with a number of limitations. Any program provider wishing to broaden their portfolio will be required to have the respective support of producer representatives within that commodity and/or region.

That makes sense.

There are also multi-year agreements, which I alluded to before on advance payments. This change will do the following:

This will allow for multi-year agreements.... This will be one of the first changes implemented, with no regulatory amendments required, and will reduce administrative burden for those applying to the program in consecutive years.

That sounds pretty good. There are also repayments without proof of sale. It says the following:

This will allow repayment scheduled suited to the perishability of non-storable crops and will allow for cash repayments where the pledged product is not sold, so long as the administrator is satisfied that the quantity of product on-farm covers the value. All advances must still be paid by the agreed due date, but this will allow producers to avoid having to sell product at inopportune times just to meet repayment requirements.

That is what I mentioned about the advanced payments and how it would be good for farmers. It is good that they would not have to sell their product right away. In this part of the act, it states that we are not just talking about grain farmers. If a potato farmer took a long time to get the crop and a lot of inputs, this advanced payment would also broaden into other commodities, like potatoes, where a farmer might be better off selling potatoes in March instead of November. This advanced payment would cover that as well.

Another part has to do with new means of repayment. It says:

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Regulatory power will be given to the Governor in Council to define new means of repayment, which will be developed in consultation with industry. This offers the potential to provide greater flexibility for unique situations like farm liquidation.

That says a lot, but at the end of the day, it is flexibility. It is flexibility if a farmer has a certain situation where they cannot sell it within one year of the crop. Let us say that there is an accident or something happens, it gives that flexibility for repayment processes, which is also a good thing.

Another part is about producer eligibility. It says:

Producer eligibility will be expanded beyond those “principally occupied” in the farming operation, allowing farmers with significant off-farm employment to also access the program.

This is a good one. As I said, there are parts of this bill that are good, but that part is for small farmers or new farmers who cannot make all of their living from their farms. They would be eligible for advanced payments where they were probably not eligible before. It would give a start for them to move on.

●(1320)

The other part of the bill is on the whole subject of advance payments. As I stated, the amount does not reflect the reality of agriculture right now. We should have at least gone to \$600,000. Some would even go to \$800,000. We could have found a median somewhere in the middle that would have worked, but a \$600,000 advance payment would have been good.

I have explained most of the bill. A lot of the time we have focused on just one part of the bill, the Seeds Act, but I think we have explained to the public a little more about what is in the bill.

There is a lot in the bill that is good. The Liberal Party will be voting for the bill because there is much in the bill that we want the farmers to have. When we are in power next, perhaps we will take care of what was not done properly and put more in there for small farmers.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, considering the licensing and registration systems and the fact that it will add the need for additional resources at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and considering the government's record in the last couple of years of budgeting for departments but then not delivering the budgeted money, we have a concern that will cause delays in licensing and registrations, as well as in enforcement. I would like the member's comments on that point.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, is the member alluding to the same problem we are seeing with Veterans Affairs, that the money is earmarked and then it is not spent?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It was not asked for.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, we have not had the final figures yet on how the government spent it.

I just hope that the government is not doing the same with the farming industry as it has with many others. It is encouraging its administrators to not let the money flow and not let things happen, so it can pad the books and make its budget look good.

We are finishing the harvesting season right now, and we should know in the next few months if the government has good intentions with advance payments for the agriculture industry. There were a lot of crops out west that had problems this year. We are going to see

how the program is rolled out and how good the Conservative government is at helping farmers.

In regard to the hon. member's question, we will know in the next few months if the government is doing a proper job, or whether it is doing like many other departments, which is holding back the money from hard-working men and women.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the hon. member across the way. We serve on the agriculture committee together. We like to work together on issues, and I want to ask the hon. member a question.

We talk about breeders' rights. We heard a lot of witnesses speaking to what we need in terms of a modern-day plant breeders' rights system, and UPOV '91 addresses that. There have been a lot of concerns around this in terms of what farmers can and cannot use, but there is a lot of misinformation out there. I would like the member across the way to reiterate what we heard from most witnesses about UPOV '91 and their support for it.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, the horticulture and the landscaping industries were talking about varieties of roses that we could develop here. There is no doubt that there is a whole lot that is good in the bill for Canadian farmers. However, it is only going to be good if the money is there for research. If we are going to have the research in our country and come up with new varieties, so be it.

There were many groups that came forward, and there were two items. One was that with global climate change and various things, we need to continue to have better varieties. Also, we are positioned well to be selling varieties of plants all over the world.

What I am concerned about is smaller farmers getting pushed around a bit and not having the legal advice or legal wherewithal to protect themselves. If there is one thing that I would like to see added to this, it is to have a kind of ombudsman, so that if a small farmer feels he is not being treated right and does not have the capacity to take on the big guys, that we step in. That is what I see is lacking here.

The proof is in the pudding. It is about how this is going to roll out. A lot of small farmers do not have the money to defend themselves. There is a part here for an ombudsman, or someone, so if they have a complaint if they are treated wrong about their seed issues, someone will take that up for them.

There was a lot of support from witnesses for that part of the bill.

Government Orders

•(1325)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend talked a bit about public research. I would like him to elaborate a bit more. The bill would allow public research with patented material up to a certain level, but not for commercial use. People could not actually commercialize it if they used it. If they could not actually make money from it, and there has been a decrease in public dollars actually going into public research, does the member have any fear or concern that the public research piece of the balance may actually decline? Where does he see it going? Even though they could get the material from a private company, they could not commercialize it, because it would be explicit that it was for non-commercial use.

Does the member see any threat to public research in the sense that there is a lot of stuff to work with but nothing to do? What effect would that have on farmers, ultimately?

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the Conservative government has a track record of cutting research. The other problem we have to watch, if the research is commercial, is whether the big companies are doing it and the government is ponying up money.

Recently I was at the agricultural college in Truro, and I saw the research being done there with public dollars. It was amazing. Just on the blueberry industry alone it was on spraying equipment, reduced pesticides, and varieties.

At the end of the day, we have to have a good research program in this country, one that is publicly funded. Not always is the best research commercialized, big-company research. A lot of research can be done. In Newfoundland, they have the cold-crops research place. Without public money going in, it would never happen. No matter where one is in this country, we need public research and public funds going into it, or we are just going to have big companies like Monsanto taking over all the research.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his thorough speech on this legislation. He is an expert, of course, on agriculture, with his background, and he brings a lot to this House in terms of that experience.

The member just spoke of the importance of research. I want to ask him a specific question about the research being done in the Annapolis Valley at the Kentville research station. In recent years, we have seen, through attrition, a reduction in the number of researchers working there. They are not being replaced at retirement.

Given the member's experience in horticulture, does he agree that regional, decentralized research is essential to the future of industries, whether it is the apple industry or the growing grape and wine industry? The research done in the Annapolis Valley is going to render a different result than that done in the Okanagan Valley or in Prince Edward County in Ontario or in the Niagara region. As such, should we not be focusing more on regional research as opposed to centralizing it, which seems to be the trend with the current government?

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kings—Hants for that question. He has one of the nicest areas to visit at apple blossom time or any time of the year.

The first time I visited that research station, I was 19 years old. I was in agricultural college, and I was amazed, and I am still amazed by what the researchers do in Kentville. When I was there first, they were doing research on potatoes for the valley and the type of soil they had there. Ten years later, when I went there, they were doing research on apples, and they came out with varieties that transformed the whole apple industry in the Annapolis Valley, which was amazing. It brought the apple industry back. Now when I go there, they are doing grape varieties and other varieties of fruit and vegetables that are very important for the Atlantic region and the valley region. That is key.

We have two things. We have climate change and we have consumer tastes changing. It is hard to believe, but where all those potato fields could have been, where they were doing research, now we see vineyards all through the Annapolis Valley, and it has become one of the fastest-growing areas.

It is key to have that research. It is one thing to bring people in and invest money in agriculture in the area, but they need research and people to help them with varieties, soil tests, and whatever needs to be done. That is a very important point the member for Kings—Hants made. If we do not continue to have that, these pockets of our country are not going to have the environment for agriculture we have seen over the years. We are going to lose it, because research in certain areas is not applicable to other areas.

•(1330)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): I would first like to say that my thoughts and prayers go out to Pat Quinn's family for their loss today. He was a great Canadian.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to express my support for Bill C-18, the agricultural growth act. This is a well-informed bill.

The proposed legislation is the result of extensive consultation with Canadian farmers, producers, and the organizations that represent them. In my view, this is the mark of a progressive, responsive, and responsible government. It is one that identifies, reviews, and establishes laws, policies, and programs in collaboration with the citizens most likely to be affected.

I support Bill C-18 because it would foster the continued growth and maturation of this country's agriculture and agri-food industry. One of the ways the proposed legislation would achieve this is by supporting the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's modernization and transformation agenda.

To fully appreciate the last point requires a good understanding of the larger context.

The CFIA is dedicated to safeguarding our food supply, along with animals and plants that contribute to that food supply. Ultimately, the CFIA serves to enhance the health and well-being of Canada's people, environment, and economy.

Government Orders

The Government of Canada established CFIA in 1997 as the federal agency responsible for the regulation and enforcement of key food and agriculture legislation. Prior to that time, several departments and agencies shared responsibility for this legislation.

Since the agency's inception in 1997, almost 20 years ago, there have been many significant changes in the agriculture and agri-food sectors across Canada and around the world. These changes include dramatic increases in crop yields due to advances in science.

In general, farms are getting larger, and economies of scale continue to grow. Land that produced enough to feed only 10 people a century ago can today feed more than 120. That is a dramatic increase.

Another significant change is the growth of international trade in agricultural products. Today Canadians regularly eat foods produced in countries around the world. In Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry, the focus is more and more on international markets. Last year, in 2013, the value of Canada's agriculture and food exports set a new record, topping \$50 billion for the first time in our history.

The legislation now before us would modernize existing statutes and support the CFIA's transformation so that it could provide the best and most efficient and effective service possible.

The next step is up to us in Parliament. By endorsing the legislation before us, members of this House can help make sure that Canada's legislation remains in step with modern processes and practices. Here is why.

Some of the laws Bill C-18 proposes to amend date back to the 1950s. Although they have served Canada well, they must be updated to support further progress to help our home-grown entrepreneurs harness innovation, add value, and create jobs and growth right across this country.

According to stakeholders who appeared before the House standing committee, Canadian farmers spend as much as \$4 billion each year on fertilizers. That is more than they spend on any other crop input. It is estimated that without fertilizer, crop production in Canada would decrease by half.

The Feeds Act and the Fertilizers Act provide the legal basis for the regulatory framework that govern the use of fertilizers. During his testimony in committee, Mr. Clyde Graham, acting president of the Canadian Fertilizer Institute, had this to say about the current state of the regulatory framework:

The federal regulatory system has served the industry well for 50 years. It has ensured a science-based and consistent regulatory environment for fertilizers and supplements, which emphasizes the principles of safety and efficacy for all products.

...That being said, the fertilizer and supplement industry supports new provisions in the bill that would enable tools such as incorporation by reference, licencing, export certificates, and acceptance of foreign equivalent scientific data.

Bill C-18 includes the provisions and tools Mr. Graham referred to in his comments. The proposed legislation now before us proposes new, broader controls on the safety of Canada's ag inputs through the licencing and registration of feed and fertilizer manufacturers.

I would like to share another relevant comment from a stakeholder who appeared before the committee. Reg Schmidt is with the Feeder

Associations of Alberta, and this is some of what he told the committee:

When the Feeder Associations of Alberta was first notified last fall of the new set of amendments, we were not anticipating this exceptional amount of change that is being proposed. We were thinking more of a lipstick and makeup approach. Instead what we got are a very well thought out set of amendments that bring another round of comprehensive updates to an otherwise excellent program

• (1335)

As Mr. Schmidt pointed out, Bill C-18 involves a series of improvements. Among other things, the legislation proposes to authorize CFIA to license or register fertilizer and animal feed operators along with facilities that import or sell products across provincial or international borders. This would enhance the current system under which feed and fertilizer products are typically registered. Adding the provision to license or register facilities and operators would provide a more effective and timely approach to verifying which agricultural products meet Canada's stringent safety and other standards.

This approach would allow for better tracking and oversight of production processes and the products being produced, a more efficient system that identifies issues early, and a faster response if and when a product recall was required.

To license or register feed fertilizer facilities and operators, regulations would have to be developed. The government would work closely with stakeholders to design an effective regime.

It is important to recognize that the new requirement would not apply to farmers who make these products for use on their own farms. It would only apply to businesses that sell their animal feed and fertilizer products across provincial and international borders.

It is also important to note that the proposed amendment would better align Canadian legislation with that of our international trading partners and would help our feed and fertilizer industries maintain their export markets, especially in the U.S.

Bill C-18 also proposes to address international trade in agricultural products in another way: by strengthening border controls for agricultural products.

Bill C-18 would authorize CFIA inspectors to order imported shipments of feeds, fertilizers, and seeds out of Canada if they failed to meet legal requirements. This would be similar to the provisions already in place that authorize the CFIA to order imported plants and animals removed from Canada if they do not meet legal requirements.

Government Orders

The CFIA already takes action now and sometimes seizes illegal products related to animal feeds, seed, and fertilizers. Under the current process, after seizure the CFIA assesses the ability of the importer to bring the products into compliance. Where this is not possible or where the importer refuses to fix the non-compliance, the CFIA may have to destroy or dispose of the product, sometimes at taxpayers' expense. In some cases, court proceedings may be launched. While this process works, it sometimes leaves Canadians paying the bill for the disposal of illegal products that have been seized.

Bill C-18 would give CFIA inspectors the ability to allow the importer to fix the problem in Canada but only if it was not a matter of safety and if they could be sure that the issue would be addressed properly and in a timely manner.

The legislation would also provide the agency with even stronger tools to protect Canada's plant and animal resource base. It would also provide additional reassurance that imported agricultural products met Canada's strict requirements. For Canada's farmers it would mean that they would compete on a level playing field.

Now I would like to again touch on the issue of UPOV '91. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency consulted broadly on plant breeders' rights. The agency conducted formal consultation sessions across Canada and received valuable feedback from plant breeders, farmers, horticulturalists, seed dealers, and the general public.

The feedback led directly to a series of proposed amendments that would increase investment in plant breeding in Canada and would encourage foreign breeders to protect and sell their varieties here. The amendments would also align the rights of Canadian plant breeders with those of their counterparts abroad.

This would effectively level the playing field for Canadian farmers and give them greater access to innovative new varieties bred to enhance crop yields, improve resistance to disease and drought, and meet specific market demands. It is what farmers want. In other words, the amendments would support the continued success of Canada's agricultural producers.

Amendments in the proposed legislation would also explicitly recognize the traditional and popular practice known as farmer's privilege. The practice involves saving, conditioning, and replanting seed generated from protected varieties grown on Canadian farms.

As members will be aware, a further amendment has been brought forward on the issue, one that makes the language in the act explicitly clear that storage of seed is included in farmer's privilege. This amendment, once again, shows that the government listens and responds to farmers.

• (1340)

Canada's farm community is very supportive of the reforms proposed in Bill C-18. For instance, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Canada's largest farm organization, posted a page on its website entitled, "C-18 is Good News for Farmers". Indeed it is. The page includes a quote from federation president Ron Bonnett, as follows:

The proposed changes reflect a number of recommendations made by industry over the years and showcase the government has been listening. We're pleased the

government has taken action and followed-up in a concrete way with legislative changes and formal consultations on these proposed amendments.

That is a certainly a ringing endorsement. The federation's web page also points out that the proposed legislation will boost innovation in the agricultural sector and inspire more farmers to plant new crop varieties. The bill is designed to modernize Canada's agricultural legislation and encourage innovation in the sector.

Joe Brennan, chair of the Canadian Potato Council, said the following about Bill C-18 and what we did as a government at committee stage:

The proposed amendments will encourage the development and availability of superior potato varieties that will further enhance the competitiveness of the Canadian potato industry.

Keith Kuhl, president of the Canadian Horticultural Council, emphasized that the proposed legislation would make Canadian companies more competitive internationally. He said, "Ensuring that our plant breeders' rights regulations are aligned with our global trading partners is imperative."

We heard more of this support from witnesses at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The Agricultural Marketing Programs Act was enacted more than 15 years ago. The act requires that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, in collaboration with the Minister of Finance, review the effectiveness of the legislation every five years. The last review was completed nearly two years ago and a report on the review was tabled in the House in November of 2012.

The review included a series of activities during the spring of 2011. For instance, stakeholders participated in a series of nine engagement workshops held in communities across the country. The sessions attracted a cross-section of Canada's agriculture industry, producers and administrators, along with representatives of producer organizations and financial institutions.

During the sessions, the stakeholders freely expressed their views on both the act and on the program that it authorized. Participants discussed program relevancy, performance, operations and delivery. They outlined specific strengths and weaknesses, and provided suggestions for potential improvements.

The review also involved a targeted survey. Questionnaires were sent out to approximately 3,000 producers who participated in the advance payments program, also known as APP, in 2008. These engagement sessions and questionnaires led directly to many of the proposed amendments to the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act included in Bill C-18.

In general, the amendments would reduce the administrative burden that producers and producer organizations must bear to participate in the program. More specific, the amendments would provide additional ways for participants to repay their loans. They would also broaden the criteria used to determine eligibility in the program and foster multi-year advance guarantee and repayment agreements, with administrators to streamline delivery.

Government Orders

I now wish to talk about the consultations with stakeholders that took place to inform the proposed amendments in another key part of Bill C-18, the Plant Breeders' Rights Act, administered by the CFIA. These stakeholder views are positive and tell only part of the story of Bill C-18. This is because the proposed legislation will inspire further consultations as resulting regulations are readied.

This government remains committed to consulting in order to determine the best path forward for farmers. Should the legislation now before us receive royal assent, some changes will come into force almost immediately, while others will be phased in or require regulatory amendments.

The overarching goal of the agricultural growth act is to strengthen Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry in a way that protects our food supply and promotes economic growth. Bill C-18 proposes to achieve this goal by ensuring that Canada's legislative framework is effective, innovative and nimble enough to deal with 21st century realities. Updated, streamlined and harmonized legislation would benefit Canadian farmers and industry, support the Government of Canada's and CFIA's modernization initiatives, and meet the interests of Canadians and Canadian farmers.

I encourage my hon. colleagues to join me in supporting Bill C-18.

• (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments put on the record by the member opposite, but I have a question with regard to an issue on the Prairies. Other colleagues of his have made reference to Manitoba's pork industry. This legislation deals with the exportation. There are great opportunities in Manitoba's pork industry, but there have been some issues with the federal government in being unable to get support with respect to temporary foreign workers, in particular, the Brandon plant.

There is a need in Canada within our agricultural community to look at seasonal workers. When we talk about the importance of the agricultural community and how productive it is for our economy, could the member provide some feedback on what he believes the government's agenda is, going forward, with regard to the temporary foreign worker program and the agricultural industry as a whole?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, although we have not studied that issue in depth at agriculture committee, the issue of TFWs, as it relates to the agricultural industry, is an important one.

From our perspective on this side of the House, we absolutely want to ensure that every Canadian is employed before any temporary foreign workers get jobs in our country. We want to see Canadians get these jobs first and foremost.

That said, there are areas that have needs, but again, we hope Canadians respond to the job opportunities that are there on the Prairies. If they need a job, we need them on the Prairies.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on so many bills, we have made proposals to enhance them to ensure that we have protections for the different entities they affect.

On this bill, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food had indicated:

I've also heard some good suggestions about providing more clarity, making the bill's language more useful, and as you alluded to, Mr. Chair, we will be passing some amendments to that end...

Yet here we are. We did propose an NDP amendment that would have required the intent to infringe on patent protection be proven first. This would have protected producers from being sued for patent infringement due to accidental reasons, while continuing to ensure that deliberate patent infringement would be pursued.

Could the member opposite explain why the government defeated this proposal, given the fact that we wanted to ensure that the proper protection would be in place?

• (1350)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, being a long-standing member of the agriculture committee, certainly we have our differences when it comes to UPOV '91. We see predominantly that the world and most Canadian producers want to see UPOV '91 introduced into Canada and really played out on the Prairies.

The member alludes to the fact that members of her party made amendments and they were not supported. The fact is that it is democratic place, it did pass as it was. Although it was extensive, debate was there.

I, for one, supported the bill as it was and wanted to see it go forward. We heard from many stakeholders that wanted to see UPOV '91 and the modern things that really would give plant breeders the protections, while protecting the rights of farmers by using their own seed.

For us, it is good the way it is, and that is why it went forward and passed democratically.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is important agricultural legislation. I want to make a general comment and look forward to his response to it.

Most of the rural areas and most of the farming areas in our country are represented by Conservative members of Parliament. There are, on the other side, though, a few members who certainly represent farmers and who have an interest in the issue.

I want to make that comment and ask for the member's thoughts on the assurance farmers can take, knowing that they are represented by Conservative MPs who have had a careful look at this legislation and have determined it to be something they are willing to operate under.

Many of us are involved in farming operations and still depend on rules that would allow us to continue to farm, particularly after we get out of politics. We want rules that will work. Would the member respond to that?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I happen to be sitting beside another member in the House who is a farmer.

Government Orders

I found this a little interesting, too. In dealing with marketing freedom for farmers in past legislation, farmers from the west actually sat on the panel, making these decisions and supporting some of these motions. The bill we are putting forward today is not just a bill by some politicians. It is a bill for farmers, by farmers and passed by farmers.

Farmers are in good hands with us. We want to ensure that we do what is right for Canadian farmers across the country, and we are doing that in this bill.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just to set the record straight, although my riding has some urban areas, it also has many rural areas, and there are a large number of farmers in my area, so farmers are not just represented by Conservatives. They are also represented by New Democrats.

I had the good fortune to rise on a number of occasions in the House to present petitions with regard to the right to save seeds. They were signed by members from my riding and many people throughout British Columbia. They were signed by farmers and non-farmers, just to be clear.

In part, the reason the New Democrats do not support the bill is because we proposed some very good amendments that looked at the right to save seed. In particular, one of the amendments had to do with protecting access to public and heritage seeds, as well as the issue of transparency and consultation required when seeds were made inaccessible.

Could the member comment on the fact that there is widespread opposition regarding the changes for farmers around that right to save seeds?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, being a member of agriculture, we have heard many of the arguments stemming from one particular organization when it comes to plant breeders' rights and the use of seed. It stems from one organization that really perpetuates the myth that farmers cannot use their own seed for their own use on their farms. In the agriculture committee we asked over and over again whether it was a myth. Over and over again, it was stated that was a myth propagated by the opposition and this one particular organization. This is on the record many times.

I would challenge the member across the way to check her facts, read the bill and read the positive comments on the fact that rights of farmers are protected in this bill. Check the facts and please state them in the House.

•(1355)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciated the opportunity to listen to the member as he spoke. He is certainly passionate about agriculture.

We did hear many near unanimous comments in support of the bill, except for the one group that the opposition seems to continually put forward here. It always seems interesting as to why the support from that group would be against the position the Quebec farmers had as they presented their positions and their great support. It must be difficult for them to play those two sides together.

Could the member talk about the fact that there has actually been an increase in research dollars into agriculture? Again, this is

something contrary to what we have been hearing from the opposition.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, the member is another colleague on the agriculture committee.

Absolutely, we always get this falsity or inaccuracy stated, and it seems to be from the opposition, that innovation and research dollars have gone down. However, they have actually gone up by 10% since we formed government in 2006. The simple fact is that we believe in innovation and research, and protecting breeders' rights is even more of an enhancement of that and more of an encouragement for breeding seed in Canada.

It is clear that we are for farmers on this side. We want to see this bill passed and see more benefits for western Canadians and all Canadian farmers.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with our member for Compton—Stanstead, whose remarks I look forward to.

As members will know, my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River is fact at the beginning of the Prairies. I always find it interesting that when Conservatives stand to talk about the Prairies, they do not talk about northwestern Ontario as the beginning of the Prairies. However, we have a lot of farmers in my riding, we have a lot of farmers in northwestern Ontario. Indeed, we have a lot of farmers in northern Ontario. I think many people seem to forget that farming takes place right across this country, not just in the Prairies.

This is an interesting bill. There are some good things in the bill, but I do have some concerns. They revolve around two areas. The first is what Conservatives are calling “farmers' privilege”, which we prefer to call “farmers' rights”. The difference between “rights” and “privilege” some may say is not that important, but I think there is an important distinction to be made.

The other area concerns the seven amendments that we put forward that would have clarified a number of grey areas in the bill. The problem with grey areas being in a bill is that things are not then spelled out, which means, almost for certain, that there will be some litigation down the road and that the judges will not have a lot to go on because the bill is a little too grey. I was disappointed that the government was not interested in putting those amendments forward, which will try to outline as I go forward.

There is another issue in that regard. When there are grey areas and a bill gets passed, any changes that need to be made are made by regulation. They are not made by coming back to the House to be done in legislation. What that will do, in essence, is give the minister, whoever the minister will be at the time, very wide discretion as to how he or she proceeds.

Those two things were not really addressed in the bill, although we made every attempt to do so.

We have always believed that it is essential to have a balanced approach when talking about plant breeders and plant breeders' rights, and this bill simply would not get us here.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continuing after question period.

• (1400)

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have seven minutes to complete his speech after we resume debate.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this fall I joined the co-chair of the all-party oceans caucus, the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, in hosting a breakfast where parliamentarians heard from a leading ocean scientist on the issue of ocean acidification. It is a phenomenon that is harming, for example, the shellfish industry in the Pacific northwest, an industry providing an outstanding product, but also valuable jobs and business opportunities for rural coastal communities. Shellfish farmers are working hard to adapt their operations by incorporating water monitoring and treatment practices. It is innovative work to improve knowledge and ultimately help ensure the continued success of this industry for the future.

I welcome all hon. members to join us today after 4:30 p.m. in room 216-N, as our oceans caucus joins with the World Wildlife Fund in presenting our third Oceans on the Hill event for this year on the topic of ocean acidification.

* * *

[Translation]

DRUG AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 27th edition of Drug Awareness Week was held recently.

This was an opportunity for the Centre d'intervention le Rond-Point in Sept-Îles to raise awareness of the problem of drug use among 10- to 24-year-olds and to promote the support, assistance, shelter and social reintegration services it provides to people with substance abuse problems.

Services are also available for family members and friends, and prevention activities are held at schools and workplaces. I have personally seen the work this organization does and have had the opportunity to talk about the harmful effects of industrialization on the social fabric of the north shore.

I would like to point out to the House today the importance of the work done by social services organizations across Manicouagan, work they do despite receiving little support from the government.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick Premier Brian Gallant had a very simple message during this year's provincial election for anyone wanting to frack natural gas in New Brunswick: "You're not welcome here." Now, after just two months in office, the Liberal premier's clear

Statements by Members

message is not so clear. Donald Arsenault, the minister of energy, now says that he will allow "some" fracking. Premier Gallant now says there are different "types" of moratoriums he will consider. This is unbelievable double-speak.

New Brunswick will succeed by allowing the development of its God-given natural resources. I stand in the House today to tell the premier that it is time to eat crow, admit he was wrong about fracking, and signal to the rest of the world that New Brunswick is open for business. My constituents want a better New Brunswick, full of good, well-paying jobs, and a strong economy. That industry can deliver that, so let us get on with it.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHEL PAQUETTE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was supposed to give a member's statement to honour Michel Paquette on October 22, the day he retired. Because of everything that happened that day, my member's statement was obviously postponed.

I would like to recognize Michel's achievements. He is a warm and helpful man who has always been committed to a job well done. He retired last month after working for the House of Commons for 38 and a half years, mainly as a messenger.

Being a messenger on Parliament Hill is an important job given the rapid, steady and sometimes stressful pace of our work environment. Rain or shine, Michel's smile and cheerful attitude made him a veritable institution in his division.

Michel was always kind and pleasant, and we were always happy to welcome him into our offices when he had a letter or parcel to deliver. I would also like to note that he began his career in the House as a page in 1978.

Happy retirement Michel, and thank you for your excellent years of service.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Canada-Cyprus parliamentary friendship group, I have learned of a great escalation in Turkey's aggressive attitude toward the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey recently deployed a research vessel escorted by warships into the exclusive economic zone of the Republic of Cyprus, where key resource projects are being explored by Cyprus with great potential for all Cypriots. This resulted in a suspension of the negotiations between Cyprus and Turkey.

Statements by Members

As agreed at the Commonwealth heads meeting last year, Canada expresses full support for, and solidarity with, the Republic of Cyprus and its sovereign right under international law to explore resources in its exclusive economic zone. Canada calls for an end to provocations that threaten stability in the eastern Mediterranean and for resumed negotiations toward a lasting solution that will bring stability to Cyprus and the entire region.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although we have been closely monitoring the outcomes of immigration cases in my riding of Laval, there have been more than five cases of family separation as a result of deportation measures taken by the Canada Border Services Agency. I should point out that these cases involve children who were born or who grew up in Canada.

Florentino Morel, the mother of two-and-a-half-year-old Laéticia, born in Quebec, was forced to leave the country with her husband and daughter. The Munoz Gallegos family received an order to leave the country within 25 days. That is 25 days to liquidate their assets, cancel follow-ups for medical treatment, take a child out of school—the child also has to leave—and leave the country where they thought they had found refuge.

These devastating separations are forced on young children and their parents, and these families are increasingly facing unrealistic timelines. Where are the values of humanity and justice? What is worse, the processes at the Citizenship and Immigration Canada and at the agency are completely incompatible and work in completely different ways.

What happened? What about the children's rights?

* * *

KOOTENAY—COLUMBIA

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 17, the people of British Columbia went to the polls to elect mayors, municipal councillors and directors for the next four years.

[English]

In my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, that included 14 municipalities and 3 regional districts. They are tasked with everything from water and sewer service to snow removal, road maintenance, and recreational facilities. They are the front-line politician. They cannot walk through their local grocery store without being told how to do things better.

[Translation]

I want to wish the best of luck to all the municipal and regional politicians elected in the riding of Kootenay—Columbia. I look forward to working with them in the near future.

[English]

HOLODOMOR

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we remember the Holodomor, a crime against humanity the world in the past knew little of, it being hidden behind the Soviet curtain of iron. More than seven million people perished in Ukraine 80 years ago in a forced famine of unimaginable horror.

The deep rich soil of Ukraine, known as the breadbasket of Europe, suffered not the ravages of nature but the savagery of one man: Stalin. While millions of Ukrainians horribly starved to death, the people of the world feasted on Ukraine's bountiful crops, stolen by Stalin's evil regime.

We must speak out in Canada and around the world to support historical truths of mankind's failings, or revisionist historians, deniers of the Holodomor, will educate the world with their version of the truth.

Today we remember the victims of the Holodomor, that dark side of humanity, and by remembering we help the world guard against those who would repeat such genocide.

* * *

[Translation]

JCI WORLD CONGRESS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am extremely pleased to rise in the House to express my staunch support for Quebec City's bid to host the biggest world congress of junior chambers of commerce, the famous JCI World Congress 2016.

This will be a huge gathering of young business people with over 3,500 delegates from over 100 countries and economic spinoffs amounting to over \$15 million. In addition, it would be a fantastic opportunity for Quebec and Canada to raise their profile, as well as for our tourism industry and our passionate young entrepreneurs.

I would like to congratulate the event organizers on their amazing work: Jean-Simon Deschênes, François Bégin, Pierre-Yves Dubois, Louis-Philippe Sutton, Patrick Roberge, Alexandre Meca, Geneviève Doyle and the many volunteers and sponsors.

Femmes Alpha, an organization I belong to that promotes women in leadership roles, also supported Quebec City's bid.

I salute my youth chamber and, like them, I too have my puck.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

UKRAINE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Friday marked the one-year anniversary of the start of the Euromaidan protests, a popular, grassroots rejection of former Ukrainian President Yanukovich and his refusal to sign the EU-Ukraine association agreement.

Statements by Members

Thousands of people gathered in Kyiv's Independence Square on Friday to commemorate and honour those who died protecting the rights of Ukrainian citizens. President Poroshenko also signed a decree recognizing the Heavenly Hundred as heroes of Ukraine.

Russia's response to last year's events has also been significant, including military occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and an active role in destabilizing eastern Ukraine by supplying soldiers and heavy arms to the Kremlin's proxy militias in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Our government continues to stand with Ukraine in the face of its current challenges. Whether it takes five months or fifty years to liberate it, we will never, ever recognize the illegal Russian occupation of any Ukrainian territory.

I say to President Putin: Crimea is Ukraine, Luhansk is Ukraine, Donetsk is Ukraine.

Our Prime Minister made it clear to Putin at the G20, "You need to get out of Ukraine."

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my office has been inundated by petitions signed by many hundreds of my constituents in support of farmers' seed rights and against the economic strategies of many GMO corporations. These petitions are circulated by the good people at the Big Carrot Natural Food Market, located in Toronto—Danforth.

The Big Carrot plays a key role in mobilizing Torontonians to support family farms, promote food safety and food security, and arrest the deepening market domination of agri-business mega-corporations.

The NDP is standing with these constituents in opposing the Conservatives' omnibus bill, Bill C-18. The NDP tabled 16 amendments to improve this bill. We sought to ensure that farmers' rights to save, reuse, exchange, and sell seeds were protected to level the playing field between seed breeders and farmers, and to protect farmers from abusive litigation by GMO seed companies.

However, every amendment was rejected by the governing Conservatives. It is time for the government to start listening to concerned Canadians and to all stakeholders.

* * *

PAT QUINN

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to one of Canada's hockey greats, Mr. Pat Quinn, who, sadly, passed away last night. Pat Quinn spent more than four decades in the NHL as a player, coach, and general manager.

Born in Hamilton, Ontario, Pat "The Big Irishman" Quinn played parts of nine NHL seasons as a defenceman with Toronto, Vancouver, and Atlanta. His true hockey greatness, however, shone brightest as an executive, and most notably behind the bench. Quinn won two Jack Adams Awards for NHL coach of the year, with the Flyers in 1989 and with the Canucks in 1992.

However, what I remember most is seeing him behind the bench when Canada won its first gold medal in 50 years at the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City. He also helped Canada bring home an under-18 gold medal, World Juniors gold, and even the World Cup gold in 2004.

I would like to offer my condolences to his wife Sandra, to the rest of his family, to his friends, and of course to all those whose lives were impacted by him, both on and off the ice. He will be missed.

* * *

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November is National Adoption Awareness Month. Sadly, there are 30,000 Canadian children and youth in foster care awaiting adoption. Canada is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that all children have a right to a safe and permanent living situation. Despite the numbers and despite our international obligations, we have done little as a nation to raise that awareness. We need to do more.

Let us consider that over 60% of runaways in Canada come from the fostering system. Of those who age out, over half of the girls turn to prostitution and the boys to crime. Many of these vulnerable youth are taken or simply seduced by human traffickers or simply go missing. This is personal to me, because my son Ian is an adopted child. Recently he graduated from Cornell, and he is now doing post-doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh.

This House needs to do everything it can to encourage adoption and to provide resources to ensure that Canada's children, like Ian, have a fair shot at life.

* * *

● (1415)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday our government was proud to announce \$200 million in new and expanded mental health initiatives for veterans, serving military members, and their families. Thanks to this investment, a new major operational stress injury clinic will be established in Halifax, and additional satellite clinics will be opened in St. John's, Chicoutimi, Pembroke, Brockville, Kelowna, Victoria, and Montreal South.

Mary Deacon, the chair of Bell's Let's Talk mental health initiative, said:

Oral Questions

We commend the work being done by the departments of National Defence and Veterans' Affairs to support the men and women who face mental illness as a result of their service to the country, including this latest commitment of an additional \$200 million.

We are proud of our continued investment to improve the lives of soldiers and veterans and their families. Facilities such as the ones we are supporting will have front-line mental health professionals and experts to ensure that those who have served and continue to serve our country in uniform have the support they need and deserve.

People can count on our Conservative government to always stand up for our veterans and our armed forces.

* * *

[Translation]

CHILD POVERTY

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this day 25 years ago, Ed Broadbent—the leader of the NDP at the time—moved a motion to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. That motion was unanimously adopted. Nearly 15 years after the failure to achieve that goal, the situation remains troubling.

It is especially troubling that the Prime Minister does not seem to care at all about this issue. On top of having described that motion as the height of stupidity, he also would rather save money at the expense of our veterans and first nations peoples by diverting money that was meant for them.

Veterans Affairs has returned \$1.1 billion to the public treasury and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has returned \$712 million, all while the Prime Minister enjoys an expensive trip to the far north, which cost taxpayers \$768,000. Now we can clearly see the Prime Minister's real priorities.

In 2015, the first NDP government will commit to honouring the 1989 resolution to eliminate child poverty.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House today and say that every single family with children under 18 of my riding of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River will benefit from our government's new measures to assist Canadian families.

Only our Conservative government understands that Canadian families know best how to spend their hard-earned money. Under our plan, every family with children will benefit from the enhanced universal child care benefit to the tune of almost \$2,000 for every child under six and \$720 per year for every child between six and 17 years of age. Likewise, the family tax cut will result in over \$1,100 for the average Canadian family.

What do the Liberals and NDP promise? Less money in Canadians' pockets and more money in the pockets of bureaucrats. The Liberal leader even said that he could convince Canadians to accept a new tax hike and promised to reverse our tax relief.

Although the Liberals would make life more expensive for hard-working Canadians, our Conservative government delivers on our promises, and we are proud to be the only party that stands up for Canadian families.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after Conservatives failed to deliver over \$1 billion in promised funding to help veterans, and just before a potentially scathing new report from the Auditor General, the minister pops up and recycles an old announcement.

Does the minister really think that recycling old commitments is suddenly going to make up for years of neglecting our injured vets and soldiers?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government consistently increases support for Canadian veterans.

Yesterday we continued that by increasing mental health support for those in the Canadian Armed Forces, veterans, and their families. Our veterans' mental health is something our government takes very seriously, and we will continue to improve on those services.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister closes regional offices to save money, denies benefits to veterans to save money, denies services to veterans to save money, and yet hundreds of millions of dollars that was earmarked for veterans was going unspent every year.

Will the minister cut the excuses and explain how not spending that \$1.1 billion makes our veterans any healthier?

• (1420)

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the assertion made in that question is absolutely false.

All governments always ensure statutory funding is fully funded to ensure there is no shortfall. This is completely normal practice.

Veterans Affairs expenditures have increased from \$2.7 billion when the Liberals were in government to \$3.5 billion last year.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years, the Conservatives denied that there was an urgent need to deal with the mental health of our soldiers and veterans.

Instead of providing soldiers and veterans with services, the Conservatives closed offices and tried to save more than \$1 billion at their expense. It took a scathing report by the Auditor General and a public relations crisis for the government to finally do something about this.

Oral Questions

Does the minister really think that he can buy veterans' silence with \$200 million?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we announced new mental health support for Canadian Armed Forces personnel, veterans, and their families.

We are investing in a major new operational stress injury clinic in Halifax. We are also opening new satellite locations across the country and expanding the current facility in the greater Toronto area.

Our government is committed to Canada's veterans, armed forces members, and their families as we continue to work on their behalf.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago the Canadian government approved the sale of thalidomide as a safe drug for use in pregnancy.

Many Canadian families suffered tragic consequences as a result of that decision. The remaining thalidomide survivors are now dealing with immense pain and suffering. For decades, they have struggled alone, but it should not have to be that way.

Will the government do the right thing and support the NDP motion to provide immediate compensation to the survivors?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this tragic event from the 1960s reminds us how seriously we need to take drug safety. Nothing can ever undo the pain and suffering inflicted.

Canada now has one of the safest drug systems in the world, recently strengthened even further with the passage of Vanessa's law. We are happy to review any policy proposals and add to conversations had earlier this year with Health Canada officials.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more than 50 years after the tragedy, a hundred or so Canadian victims of thalidomide are waiting for compensation.

At the time, the Canadian government delayed pulling the drug off the shelves, and hundreds of Canadians died or became disabled. It is high time to correct this injustice.

The question now is: will the government support our motion and support the thalidomide survivors or not?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada has learned from this tragedy and has made improvements that have reduced the risk of this kind of terrible event from occurring again, including an overhaul of Canada's drug regulatory framework.

Again I will repeat that we are happy to review any policy proposals and add to conversations had earlier this year with Health Canada officials.

[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite our soldiers' pleas, the Conservatives closed nine veterans' service centres this year. They preferred to spend \$743 million on partisan propaganda. Although there have been 160 military suicides in the past decade, the Conservatives preferred to keep \$1.1 billion that was allocated to veterans.

Today, the day before the Auditor General is set to release a report, they are making a last-minute promise to allocate \$200 million over six years to help veterans with mental health issues.

Why should our veterans believe this government?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has consistently increased support for Canadian veterans. Yesterday, we continued that by increasing mental health support for those in the Canadian Armed Forces, veterans, and their families.

Our veterans' mental health is something our government takes very seriously, and we will continue to improve on those services.

● (1425)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the parliamentary secretary admitted that Veterans Affairs sent \$1.13 billion back to the treasury, instead of spending it on veterans. This weekend, the minister contradicted his parliamentary secretary, saying that the money is recycled into veterans programs, but all we ever see are self-serving TV ads.

Now facing a mounting backlash, and on the eve of the Auditor General's report, the Conservatives have announced inadequate funding for veterans and their families, a fraction of the \$1.13 billion.

Can the minister tell us now, of this \$200 million announcement, how much do they plan to lapse?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the assertion made in that question is absolutely false. All governments always ensure that statutory funding is fully funded to ensure that there is no shortfall. This is a completely normal practice. As proof, in the last year of the Liberal government, Veterans Affairs lapsed \$111 million in one year under a much smaller budget.

The simple fact is that Veterans Affairs expenditures have increased under our government, and that party voted against it.

Oral Questions

Mr. Frank Valeriotte (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, do you know what they could have done with that billion dollars? They could have easily kept all of the nine veterans offices open. They could have hired enough case workers so that veterans do not have to wait to access services. In the face of 160 military suicides in the last decade, they could have hired more mental health professionals. They could have provided the funds to ensure dignified funerals for all veterans.

Now, it is too little, too late. Why do they make veterans beg for the services they need and deserve?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is no secret that Canadians still remember that it was under the Liberal government that our men and women suffered the decade of darkness.

When it comes to standing up for Canada's veterans and men and women in uniform, our government has a strong record. That is exactly why our government has spent over \$30 billion since taking office. That is \$5 billion in additional funding.

We will continue to stand up for Canada's veterans on this side of the House.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the NDP predicted during the initial debate on the mission to Iraq, this weekend, the Minister of Justice indicated that the government is considering air strikes in Syria. That poses a number of problems, particularly if it involves associating with Bashar al-Assad and asking his permission.

The Conservatives are also telling us that such air strikes should not be interpreted as an attack on the Syrian government.

Can the minister confirm that Canada is considering air strikes in Syria?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is focused on the current mission that the Canadian men and women in uniform are conducting. That includes air strikes against ISIL in Iraq, and soldiers performing an advise and assist function in and about Erbil.

This is the extent of Canada's mission, and all Canadians should be tremendously proud of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear here that the Conservatives explicitly left the door open to bombing Syria and the NDP explicitly opposed that. Now, the government is considering expanding Canada's aerial strikes into Syria at Bashar al-Assad's behest. They have gone from "Assad must go" to "We will go with Assad's permission".

Will the minister confirm that he is seeking Assad's permission for air strikes in Syria?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the men and women of our armed forces are very focused on their current mission, which is twofold: to provide support and

advise and assist on the ground around Erbil and, of course, the air mission.

We are also working on things like ensuring that we cut off financing. We are also working on the humanitarian side. We are also working to ensure that there is inclusive government with an inclusive program, and we are making good progress on all of those.

* * *

[Translation]

POVERTY

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 21% of our children are living in poverty. That is one in five children.

Aboriginal and immigrant children are disproportionately affected. We are talking about our country's future, the leaders of tomorrow, who are growing up in unsuitable conditions.

Will the Conservatives listen to UNICEF's recommendations and set goals to ensure that children are not the victims of their poor budget choices?

● (1430)

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken real action when it comes to reducing poverty. In fact, the action that we have taken has been recognized by UNICEF. It recognized that during the depths of the recession, we lifted 180,000 children out of poverty.

Let me tell the House what David Morley, president and CEO of UNICEF Canada, said. He said that Canada is faring better than other western countries, due to measures that are favourable to families, like tax credits, fiscal measures, and benefits that have been maintained or put in place to counter the effects of the global crisis.

Those are measures we put into place that are actually having an effect. We will not listen to the NDP. We will continue—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hochelaga.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not see what the Conservatives have to be happy about right now. We rank 20th among the 41 richest countries in the world. A total of 21% of our children are living in poverty, and UNICEF has indicated that conditions are even worse for the most disadvantaged. That is the record of the Conservatives and the Liberals.

Is the minister telling us that she thinks these statistics are acceptable?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is unbelievable is the NDP. Here are the facts. There are nearly 1.4 million fewer Canadians living in poverty under this government and this Prime Minister than under the Liberals and any other government. Our policies have lifted 225,000 children out of poverty. I could go on with the evidence-based effects that our policies are having.

Oral Questions

They can keep asking questions. We will keep delivering results for Canadian children.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one in five Canadian children lives in poverty today and the minister thinks that is reason for self-congratulation. Twenty-five years ago today, the House made a solemn commitment to Canada's children that they would not have to grow up in poverty. However, 25 years later, here are the facts: child poverty levels have increased significantly from 13% in 1989 to 21% today.

Instead of constantly giving tax breaks to the wealthy in this country who really do not need them, why will the Conservative government not introduce a real plan to eliminate child poverty?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is why will the NDP not support measures that actually lift children and families out of poverty? We are not saying this. Organizations like UNICEF are saying it. It is things like our universal child care benefit, which we introduced and the New Democrats said was a slap in the face to Canadian families. What do New Democrats think of the universal child care benefit? They would take it away.

Not only have we introduced it, we are also going to increase it, we are going to expand it. We will look at the facts, we will depend on evidence. We will not listen to the NDP because we know that all they want to do is to create big bureaucracies and increase taxes on Canadian families.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives pat themselves on their backs while more than a million children in Canada live in poverty. This is no time for self-congratulations by them.

Food bank rates are at a record level and nearly 4 out of 10 who attend food banks are children. The number of kids who wake up in homeless shelters is rising, not falling, under the Conservatives, and far too often first nation children live in conditions that are on par with some of the poorest countries on the planet.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. Twenty-five years after Ed Broadbent brought a motion into the House of Commons to end child poverty, will he dump his \$3 billion income-splitting scheme and finally do something to end poverty in Canada?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what Canadian families know. They know that under our government they have more money in their pockets. Since we took office, there are 225,000 fewer children in poverty. The average Canadian family has an additional \$3,400 in their pocket. With our universal child care benefit increase and expansion, as well as our family tax cut, there will be an average of \$1,200 more in the pockets of Canadian families.

We know what the NDP plan is, a \$5 billion plan that will help less than 10% of Canadian families, do nothing for rural families, and do nothing for families who are working part time, so we will not listen to its ideology. We will deliver results.

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives really have no respect for the work federal public servants do. It is unbelievable that they recently sent a mass email asking public servants to retweet Conservative propaganda and their latest election slogan. Is that not partisan?

Why do the Conservatives not let public servants do their jobs and serve Canadians instead of trying to embroil them in their electioneering?

• (1435)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our tax cuts for Canadian families. We have reduced their tax burden by \$3,500 a year.

With the reforms recently announced by the Prime Minister, the average Canadian family will have an additional \$1,200 a year and all families with children under 18 years of age will benefit from these tax cuts and receive these new family benefits. We obviously have to inform Canadians.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is the king of false advertising, having blown over \$100 million on partisan promotion. We now understand that it is telling civil servants to get on Twitter to act as cheerleaders for the Conservatives' dubious income-splitting scheme for the rich.

The fact is, civil servants are supposed to act in a non-partisan fashion. Why will the Conservatives not leave our civil servants alone so they can do the jobs that Canadians hired them for, border security, scientific research, helping seniors, rather than acting as Twitter trolls for the Conservative Party?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that Canadians are aware of the availability of the new expanded universal child care benefit, for which they should apply. If they have children between the ages of 7 and 18, they can now receive a brand new benefit of \$60 a month per child. That is \$720 a year. In addition, newborns to the age of 6 can now receive a universal child care benefit in the order of \$160 a month. That is \$1,920 a year.

These are very significant benefits. We want to make sure that Canadians are aware of and apply for these benefits.

Oral Questions

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if they cannot answer a question in Parliament, how the heck are they going to explain it on Twitter?

We are talking about the misuse of the public service by the Conservative Party. This has not been approved by Parliament and it will benefit only the super rich.

Why does the government not do what the civil servants should be doing? Leave them alone to do the job that Canadians are paying for, rather than having to act as “pom pom Twitterati” for the government and the minister?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the member demonstrates why he is not taken very seriously. He does not even bother to become even vaguely acquainted with the facts, which are that two-thirds of the beneficiaries of this package will be modest and low-income families.

He refers to the super rich. Does he think that single moms with a couple of kids living below the poverty line are super rich? In fact, two such children under the age of 6 would benefit to the amount of over \$3,800, which, for a single mom with two kids, is an awful lot of money.

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HEALTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 95 people are living today with severe disability due to thalidomide. They need government support now. Our drug approval system failed these Canadians once. The Minister of Health has a responsibility to do what is just and compassionate so they are able to live their lives with dignity, optimum functioning, and free from pain.

Will the minister do the right thing?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, this horrible event from the sixties reminds us of how seriously we need to take drug safety. We now have one of the safest drug systems in the world. Recently, we strengthened it even further with the passage of Vanessa's law.

I would tell the member that we are happy to review any policy proposals and add to earlier conversations with Health Canada officials this year.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Justice Louis LeBel is about to retire from the Supreme Court, but it appears that no appointment process has been put in place, no published protocol of consultation, no selection panel, no parliamentary review, no public engagement, no transparency and no accountability, yet in 2004 Conservative members of the justice committee, including the now Minister of Justice himself, recommended “... there must be a public review of a short list of nominees before a parliamentary committee”.

Does the minister stand by his own recommendation for a public, parliamentary, accountable, transparent process?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know full well that it was in fact our government that put in place the most-inclusive, most-consultative process that we have ever seen in the history of Canada when it comes to Supreme Court judges. That was not the case when he held the office that I currently occupy.

I can promise the hon. member that we will be consulting broadly with prominent members of the bar association, the judiciary, and, of course, the elected members of the Government of Quebec. I note the hon. member has recently been making plans to leave this place, and we might even consider him.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the recommendations made by the Minister of Justice in 2004 concerning Supreme Court appointments could have prevented the Marc Nadon fiasco. Instead, the process was sabotaged by the Prime Minister's Office, and now the minister's recommendations and parliamentary involvement have both been abandoned.

Why this contradiction?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that the opening has not actually occurred as yet, but the member, I repeat for the record, should know that we do in fact consult very broadly. We have taken the time to consult with the elected government of the Province of Quebec. We are hearing from the judiciary. We are hearing from the members of the bar, both the Canadian Bar Association and the bar from Quebec, retired judges, and retired individuals, who have much to offer.

However, let us not lose sight of the fact that the overriding criteria is legal excellence, merit, and that it is a decision for the executive branch of the government.

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PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back in 2004, the Liberal government was sued by the firm Envoy after realizing that the integrated public service relocation program, which cost the government \$300 million annually, was rigged.

Now, 10 years later, the Conservative government has paid \$35 million to settle the lawsuit, but that was not made public and it was not announced anywhere. Everything was kept secret until it had to be revealed, buried deep in the public accounts.

Would the government tell us if the settlement means that there was serious wrongdoing?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government did indeed reach an agreed-upon settlement with the company following on the very failed procurement by the previous Liberal government.

We are committed to ensuring that Canadians do receive value for their hard-earned tax dollars. That is why we are reviewing the process again to ensure that any new contracts will meet those standards.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 10 years after the Liberals terminated the Envoy contract for the relocation of public servants, we are learning from the public accounts that the price tag for their incompetence is \$35 million, the amount needed to quietly settle with a bidder that was cavalierly pushed aside by the Liberals.

Can the government explain why most large bidding processes end in catastrophe and why, at the end of the day, Canadians are forced to pick up the tab?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that the former Liberal government awarded a contract following a failed procurement process. That is why the company turned to the courts and is no longer providing services.

We will ensure that future contracts do a better job of protecting taxpayers' money.

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[English]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to neglect the people of southern Ontario with a broken promise to invest in the region. Despite a commitment for \$200 million over five years for the advanced manufacturing fund, it is 18 months later and not a dime has gone out the door. We have lost far too many good family-supporting jobs in southern Ontario while the Conservatives look the other way.

Is the minister incapable or unwilling to get this money out the door?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the application deadline for the first round of the advanced manufacturing fund, which the member voted against, by the way, just passed last month, and so the first recipients of this particular fund will be announced in the coming weeks.

This fund is yet another example of our government helping employers in Ontario to become more competitive on the global stage and create jobs in Ontario.

• (1445)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Well, no rush, Mr. Speaker. Forget about those southern Ontario families who are suffering through the manufacturing crisis.

The Prime Minister was in London today, but there was still no news of money from the advanced manufacturing fund.

Since the Conservatives took office, London has lost 10,000 good manufacturing jobs, and, since last year, the Conservatives have been sitting on \$200 million that was promised to create jobs and opportunities in southern Ontario.

Why is the minister shortchanging Canadian manufacturing?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member speaks of only one fund and conveniently forgets all of the others.

This particular fund that the member talks about, the advanced manufacturing fund, is for large, transformative, large-scale, multi-year, multi-partnered investments. This fund's first round of money just closed last month, and I am excited about some of the projects that are in that fund.

The member has conveniently forgotten the \$20 million that we announced for manufacturing just last week. This fund has a lot of exciting projects, and we will be announcing them in the next few weeks.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Royal Canadian Navy is in the midst of its most intensive and comprehensive renewal in its peacetime history. This includes the Halifax-class frigate modernization program. This program, which remains on schedule and on budget, represents an investment of \$4.3 billion from our government.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence please update this House on the modernization of our frigates and what it means to our armed forces?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is ensuring that our sailors have the modern equipment that they need to monitor and defend Canadian waters and continue contributing to international naval operations.

We are happy to announce that following recent sea trials, the HMCS *Fredericton* will deploy early next year as our first fully modernized frigate. The modernization program is giving our frigates new radar, a new electronic warfare system, upgraded communications technology, and new missiles.

This successful program, made possible through investments from this government, will ensure that the Royal Canadian Navy remains ready aye ready for years to come.

*Oral Questions***JUSTICE**

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to nominating judges, Conservative incompetence is going from a political embarrassment to a systemic problem. In Ontario alone, there are 31 vacancies for federally appointed judges, and 23 of those are on the Superior Court.

Our courts need judges to function. Cases are being delayed by more than nine months. When will the Conservatives get on with the job and appoint the eligible judges that our justice system needs?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I assure the hon. member that we are doing just that.

The hon. member would know that it is necessary to consult with the judiciary, with the elected government of the province affected by these vacancies, and with the bar associations.

We take the time to ensure that we get the best candidates, those who meet the criteria of legal excellence and competence. These are the type of judges that the member knows and would support are going to serve Canadians in that role.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that justice delayed is justice denied for everyone, especially victims.

[*Translation*]

There are 31 vacancies for judges in Ontario. Some seats have even been empty for 18 months. The government needs to get a move on here.

The minister's inaction is having a negative impact on all courts, from the Superior Court to the Court of Appeal, not to mention the Supreme Court of Canada. Victims who are awaiting justice are the first victims of the minister's inaction.

When will he get to work and nominate judges in order to reduce wait times? The clock is ticking.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, access to justice is a concern for all, but it is more than just the appointment of judges that will lead to a more functioning process.

With respect to these appointments, I would reiterate for the member and for this House that we continue to consult broadly to ensure we are getting the absolute best candidates, best people, to represent us on the courts. The criteria of competence, legal excellence, and merit are the overriding concerns. I assure the hon. member that we will have some appointments coming very soon.

* * *

● (1450)

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on last night's *Tout le monde en parle*, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois invited Quebeckers to follow his lead and

contribute to a fund to support public opposition to the TransCanada pipeline.

Since last evening, more than \$165,000 has been collected. This shows that Quebeckers are concerned and that they do not feel they are being heard by this government, which has watered down the environmental assessment process.

When will the Conservatives admit that they are responsible for this whole mess?

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not take positions on specific application for energy infrastructure until an independent review is complete.

Our government relies on the independent National Energy Board for decisions related to proposals of energy infrastructure, including TransCanada's energy east proposal. We look forward to receiving the result of its rigorous, thorough, and independent review.

Our government has been clear. Proposals will not be approved unless they are safe for Canadians and safe for the environment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives we no longer have a credible mechanism to determine whether projects are socially acceptable.

The pipeline assessment process has been completely discredited. By declaring that social acceptability is nothing more than an ideological concept, the Minister of Natural Resources has shown that he cares little about the public and public opinion.

Instead of trying to get this project approved at any cost, why does the minister not consult the public and listen to them?

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been clear that projects will only proceed if they are safe for Canadians and safe for the environment.

The National Energy Board is responsible to hear from those who may be directly affected by this project and those who have expertise on the matter.

* * *

AGRICULTURAL AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than 140,000 Canadians who are employed in the fresh fruit and vegetable sector have been let down by the government. Its failed perishable agricultural commodities act is jeopardizing billions in produce sales.

The minister is minimizing the devastation that this has on small growers. With 75% of the produce industry being small business, it is risky growing produce and margins are tight.

Will the minister act now so that the produce industry can be protected?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the importance of Canada's fresh produce industry and its contribution to our economy. That is why we have introduced clear legislation to provide a single dispute resolution body that would help reduce issues of non-payment faced by the fresh produce industry.

In addition, we are consulting widely on Canada's bankruptcy and insolvency laws, and these will come before Parliament in the near future.

Our government is committed to supporting Canadian producers and exporters, and we will continue to work on this issue.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): The trouble is, Mr. Speaker, that proposal just will not work, and the industry has told that to the government.

The facts are that Canadian fruit and vegetable sellers have had long-standing protection under United States law. They no longer have that protection, as of October 1. As a result, Canadian jobs, Canadian farmers, and parts of our supply chain, are at serious risk.

Industry has made it clear: it needs a Canadian-made perishable commodities act, and that is the only option to protect produce suppliers. Why not implement that viable option?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with the industry just last week. When the Safe Food for Canadians Act was before Parliament, one of the top requests from this sector of agriculture was that there be put in place legislation to provide a single dispute resolution body. That was done. That came before Parliament and it was passed.

There are other possible solutions, and these were discussed at the meeting I had with industry representatives last week.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the past week, over 50 people have been arrested for protesting Kinder Morgan's test drilling on Burnaby Mountain, and this includes the arrest this weekend of two 11-year-old girls.

These are not radicals; they are regular people who rightly feel shut out of the flawed process to review this pipeline. They have no faith in the environmental review process that was gutted by these Conservatives.

Why has the government deliberately set up a process that is primed for this kind of conflict? Let us not pretend that the NEB process is any more than a sham.

• (1455)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we respect the right of Canadians to peaceful protest; however, the rule of law must be followed.

This project will undergo a rigorous science- and fact-based review by the National Energy Board. The board must hear from

Oral Questions

those who are directly affected by a proposed project and may choose to hear from those with relevant expertise on the project.

Again, we have been clear: projects will only proceed if they are safe for Canadians and safe for the environment.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's process involves arresting people. It actually should involve consulting Canadians.

This is about getting development right, not doing it at any cost. The Conservatives do not seem to believe in social licence. They think it is an ideological term. They should tell that to the folks who are on Burnaby Mountain right now. With no real, credible evaluation process, arresting people is not going to give projects like Kinder Morgan's social licence.

Why has the government so thoroughly and completely broken trust with the public on energy project review?

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board is a robust, independent regulatory body that conducts a rigorous science- and fact-based review on projects.

As I said, the board must hear from those who are directly affected by a proposed project and may choose to hear from those who have relevant expertise on the matter.

Again, we have been clear: these projects will not proceed if they are not safe for Canadians and not safe for the environment.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were shocked with the horrific terrorist attacks of late October. As a result of extreme actions by ISIL, Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent and Corporal Nathan Cirillo lost their lives.

Often in the past we have had a tendency to under-react to these very real threats against us. My constituents want to see this Conservative government take strong action to protect them from violent terrorists.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on what the government is doing in this regard?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Prince Edward—Hastings, who has the important role of chair of the public safety committee.

This very afternoon I will appear in front of the committee to invite that member to support the protection of Canada from terrorists act. We are removing the passports from those terrorists. We are ready to take out dual citizenship when they are convicted of terrorist acts. It is unfortunate that the opposition is opposed to this.

Oral Questions

We are sure of one thing. We will move forward with surveillance, arrest, and detention. These are additional measures to keep Canadians safe.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2009 the Prime Minister attended the Copenhagen conference and committed Canada to reducing carbon pollution to 17% below 2005 levels. However, the environment commissioner says Canada is on track to miss its Copenhagen targets.

Next week, leaders from around the world will convene in Peru to begin negotiations on the new climate agreement before the summit begins.

I have a simple question for the Minister of the Environment. Will Canada achieve its Copenhagen commitment?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always been clear that in any international agreement to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, all major emitters and economies must do their part. With the U.S. and China accounting for 39% of global greenhouse gas emissions, we are encouraged by the promises they have made to reduce their emissions, as Canada emits less than 2%.

In 2012 Canada's greenhouse gas emissions were roughly 5% lower than 2005 levels, while the economy grew by 10%.

We will continue to play our part by reducing emissions at home and by working with our partners across the globe to establish an international agreement that would include all—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Halifax's Leave Out Violence program, or LOVE program, does incredible work by helping extremely at-risk youth find and keep jobs in our community. There are glowing reports of its success. Everyone at the department recommended a renewal of LOVE's funding, but the minister denied its funding.

How are people supposed to play by the rules when the minister changes the rules at whim, casts aside evidence, and ignores everyone's advice? Why is he denying funding to LOVE, a program with proven success in helping at-risk youth?

• (1500)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, very simply, the proposed grant would have cost approximately \$45,000 in tax dollars for every job created.

I know that to the New Democrats there is no limit in the largesse with which they would have government spend tax dollars. We are committed to creating jobs and assisting youth at risk, which is why we invest enormously in skills development in that area. However, there has to be a practical limit. I know the New Democrats would be

happy to spend \$80,000 or \$120,000, but we think that spending \$45,000 in tax dollars to create one job is unreasonable and unjustifiable.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to reports from the Associated Press, ISIL is actively conscripting children for battle at a young age. A United Nations panel has reported that ISIL "...prioritises children as a vehicle for ensuring long-term loyalty, adherence to their ideology and a cadre of devoted fighters that will see violence as a way of life."

These are incredibly disturbing reports. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence please update the House on Operation Impact and Canada's ongoing contribution to the fight against ISIL?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for her work in ending human trafficking and child warriors.

These are indeed horrific and disturbing reports. It is just further proof that ISIL is a barbaric and murderous organization. The fact is that it has to be stopped. I can confirm that aircraft in the Royal Canadian Air Force have now conducted 109 sorties. Last week, in a pre-planned mission, two CF-18 fighter jets successfully struck ISIL fighting positions in the desert area near Kirkuk. This has significantly assisted the Iraqi security forces that are fighting ISIL on the ground in the region.

Make no mistake, Canada will do its part in this fight against tyranny, oppression—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while toxic dust continues to fall on Limoilou and Beauport Bay, the government insists on allowing ports to evade provincial environmental regulations.

Véronique Lalonde, of Initiative citoyenne de vigilance du Port de Québec, is in Ottawa today to share the concerns of the people of Quebec City.

Will the minister finally put an end to her policy of impunity and ensure that environmental laws are obeyed on port property?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the Port of Quebec is an arm's-length organization and as such is responsible for its own operational decisions. However, I can confirm for the member that the Port of Quebec has been working with a number of tenants over the last number of months in order to implement important measures to reduce the contamination of dust emissions.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with its cuts, the federal government is forcing CBC/Radio-Canada to make unfortunate decisions. We thought that the government would allow the public broadcaster to maintain its freedom with respect to creativity and programming.

However, it seems that the former heritage minister personally intervened to get more time for the monarchy, to support Canadian nation-building, and to ensure that the former leader of the Bloc Québécois would not be hired.

Will the Prime Minister launch an independent review to ensure that the crown corporation's journalistic independence is protected and to build a thick wall between the news staff and politicians?

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's appointments come after a rigorous, transparent, and merit-based selection process. Our goal is to appoint candidates who are the most competent into each one of those positions. Our government does not interfere with the democratic process and the democratic rights of board members to vote for or donate to any other parties.

I will say it again: the CBC acts independently.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, a group of people and social leaders from Ahuntsic are calling for 1,000 affordable housing units to be created in the next 10 years, and rightly so.

Many of the current affordable housing units are in jeopardy because agreements with the federal government are coming to an end. By 2016, 100,000 housing units in Canada will lose their financial support, and that includes many in Ahuntsic.

Does the government understand that it needs to reverse its decision and renew these agreements?

● (1505)

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, housing agreements have been coming to an end over the last many years and will continue to come to an end over the next 20 years because the mortgages are paid off.

What we have done, though, in order to help these housing units is extend our investment in affordable housing with the provinces. They are free, once these agreements come to an end, to continue support.

We have also created some flexibilities for co-ops.

Nicholas Gazzard, of the Co-Operative Housing Federation, said of our flexibilities:

This additional flexibility allows co-ops to use federal funds to provide rent-geared-to-income assistance for vulnerable low-income households, even after their funding agreements have expired.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian Intellectual Property Office, Canada has 25 recognized geographic indicators. In the 2004 agreement with the European Union, only 9 of the 25 indicators were protected in the European Union, but we recognized more than 1,400.

Recently, in the free trade agreement, this government recognized an additional 179 European geographic indicators, but we got no additional protection for our products.

Is there a reason why this government is refusing to protect Canadian products internationally?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of that question.

As in any other trade negotiation, our trade negotiations with the European Union represented an outcome that represents a Canadian balance. We are very pleased with that balance.

I would remind the member that this is the most comprehensive trade agreement that Canada has ever signed. It is going to add 80,000 new jobs to our economy. It is going to add \$12 billion of additional economic activity to our economy.

This is an excellent outcome for Canadians, and I hope he will support it when he has a chance to vote for it in this House.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Senator Marcela Guerra Castillo, the head of a delegation of representatives from the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies of the United Mexican States participating in the 20th Canada-Mexico Interparliamentary Meeting.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to the study on proposals for a miscellaneous statute law amendment act, 2014.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, today is the 25th anniversary of the House's unanimous approval of the resolution to eliminate poverty among Canadian children.

All of the parties worked together to achieve this monumental goal, but a quarter-century later, the work is still unfinished.

[English]

Following talks between the parties, I am standing here to ask all members of the House, members from all parties, to recommit to that goal. We owe it to the parliamentarians who came together 25 years ago, and most importantly, we owe it to all Canadian children. Therefore, I would like to seek unanimous consent for the following motion:

I move that the House recognize the 25th anniversary of the unanimous resolution of the House to eliminate poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, adopted on November 24, 1989, and since that goal has not been achieved, that the House recommit itself to eliminating poverty among Canadian children.

[Translation]

That the House recognize the 25th anniversary of the unanimous resolution of the House to eliminate poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, adopted on November 24, 1989, and since that goal has not been achieved, the House recommit itself to eliminating poverty among Canadian children.

● (1510)

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

* * *

PETITIONS

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions.

The first is with regard sex selection. It says that the three deadliest words in the world are “it’s a girl” and that through the practice of sex selection internationally, there are now over 200 million girls missing, making the world a very dangerous place. The society of gynaecologists has strongly condemned this practice. A recent poll said that 92% of Canadians are opposed to this, and they are asking Parliament to condemn this horrible form of discrimination against women and girls.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition highlights, sadly, that 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people who have also lost loved ones to impaired drivers, called Families for Justice, believes that the current impaired driving laws are much too lenient.

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

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from over 400 constituents asking the government to immediately prohibit Kinder Morgan from building a new bitumen-based, export-only crude oil pipeline between Edmonton and Burnaby.

There are many facts in this petition. I know that I am not allowed to read these verbatim, but perhaps I can express the sentiment through a letter I received from Jamie Antone, an eight-year-old member of the Squamish first nation, who is up at Burnaby Mountain. Jamie simply says:

I'm 8 years old. I'm a Squamish member. I say NO to the Kinder Morgan pipe [line]...because we only have one earth and need to take care of it.

PAN-CANADIAN CONCUSSION STRATEGY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, concussions can deeply impact individuals psychologically, neuro-psychologically, socially, and economically. Those living with this brain injury deserve comprehensive action and support.

The petitioners are calling on the government to enact a pan-Canadian concussion awareness week; a pan-Canadian strategy for prevention, diagnosis and management; and a centre of excellence for concussion research.

FIREARMS

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present to the House from my constituents in Medicine Hat. They say that law-abiding Canadian citizens should be free to use firearms for recreational use and that the current ability of the RCMP and bureaucrats to make decisions on the spot regarding the classification of guns impedes the rights of law-abiding Canadians.

The petitioners are asking the House of Commons to fix that legislation so that bureaucrats can no longer have control over weapons classifications, to decriminalize firearms by eliminating sections 91 and 92 of the Criminal Code, and finally, to eliminate chief firearms officers and rescind firearms subsection 58(1).

CANADA POST

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have risen a number of times in this House to table petitions similar to this one. It concerns the cuts to Canada Post. As members know, Canada Post is looking at eliminating door-to-door delivery. It means that there would be an impact on 8,000 jobs. These petitioners are also concerned about the fact that there has been an increase in postage and now less service. They are concerned about the impact this will have on elderly people, as well.

Most of these people are from Elliot Lake, which is a retirement community. I am pleased to table this petition in this House.

Routine Proceedings

●(1515)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this year the town of Horwood, in
Newfoundland and Labrador, celebrates Come Home Year 2014.

I have a petition to present in this House of Commons regarding
Canada Post. The reduction in services has caused great concern in
many rural communities, especially in this particular community of
Horwood. I have around 40 names from that one community. People
are deeply concerned about the lack of postal services and the future
reduction of services in that community.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, about half
of all workers in Toronto cannot access a full-time, stable job, and
this particularly affects young people. The youth unemployment rate
is twice the national average. We have graduates at home trying to
find that first job in their trained profession and are unable to access
that kind of job.

The petitioners who signed this petition are calling for a national
urban worker strategy that would, among many things, increase
enforcement and strengthen labour standards to prevent the
exploitation of workers and unpaid interns.

[Translation]

PORT OF QUÉBEC

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to
present a petition today regarding the Quebec Port Authority entitled
“For public consultation regarding the Port of Québec”.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to compel
the Quebec Port Authority to hold public consultations with any
individuals and organizations in the Quebec City region that will be
affected by any current or future development projects, pursuant to
the Canada Marine Act. This is important. This is about a public
health and public safety issue that is crucial to Quebec City. I am
honoured to present this petition containing hundreds of signatures.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker,
I am so pleased to have heard the hon. member for Burnaby—New
Westminster raise the issue of the current blockades at Kinder
Morgan. I am bringing forward petitions from close to 800 people
from Vancouver, Vancouver Island, and Quebec calling for a tanker
ban to ensure that dilbit and crude oil tankers do not ply the west
coast of British Columbia.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker,
I also bring forward a petition with signatures from Halifax and all
the way to my riding to Salt Spring Island. The petitioners are calling
for the current government to take action to ensure that genetically
modified organisms are labelled so that Canadian consumers can
make a choice.

[Translation]

DEFINED BENEFIT PENSION PLANS

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I
am pleased to present a petition concerning defined benefit pension
plans. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to
oppose any changes that will allow employers to break their
promises regarding defined benefit pension plans and to not
authorize the conversion of defined benefit plans into so-called
shared risk plans, which would reduce the amount of pension
benefits payable to retirees.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to
improve retirement security for workers who have to use a company
pension plan.

[English]

MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I
have petitions from many dozens of petitioners from my community
in Parkdale—High Park who are concerned about the issue of mental
health, which affects one in five Canadians over their lifetimes. They
are people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, income, and education
levels. The stigma attached to mental health is often a barrier to their
seeking and getting treatment and costs the Canadian economy up to
\$50 billion each year.

The petitioners want to make mental health a priority for Canada
and want to see the Mental Health Commission's recommendations
implemented by the government.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of
the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if
Questions Nos. 743, 744 and 745 could be made orders for returns,
these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 743—**Mr. Scott Simms:**

With regard to the migration of the Elections Commissioner to the Director of
Public Prosecutions: (a) what are the total costs which have been incurred, broken
down by (i) department or agency, (ii) dollar cost, (iii) purpose, (iv) date; (b) what are
the total additional costs anticipated, broken down by (i) department or agency, (ii)
dollar cost, (iii) purpose, (iv) anticipated date; (c) what are the details of any
correspondence, memos, notes, emails, or other communications in any way
regarding the transition or move, broken down by (i) relevant file numbers, (ii)
correspondence or file type, (iii) subject, (iv) date, (v) purpose, (vi) origin, (vii)
intended destination, (viii) other officials copied or involved; and (d) what benefit
does the government anticipate from these expenditures?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

Question No. 744—Ms. Irene Mathysen:

With regard to government funding through Status of Women Canada: (a) what funds, grants, loans and loan guarantees has the government issued in the city of London and surrounding area since January 2011, including the 2014 Budget and up to today, and, in each case where applicable, what are (i) the names of the recipients, if they were groups or organisations, (ii) the monetary value of the payment made, (iii) the percentage of program funding covered by the payment received, (iv) the purpose of the funding; (b) were there any funds that were announced by the government or Status of Women Canada but were not disbursed; (c) what were the reasons for non-disbursement; (d) what oversight mechanism is in place to ensure funding is spent appropriately; (e) what were the criteria used to determine approved projects; (f) what reporting and auditing requirements are funding recipients responsible for; and (g) what organizations or individuals applications were denied funding?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 745—Mr. Charlie Angus:

With respect to the implementation of the recently passed Bill C-23: (a) what was the full itemized cost of implementing the Bill, particularly regarding the recent transfer of the Commissioner of Election Canada's operations to the Director of Public Prosecutions; (b) what was the full itemized cost of implementing this move; and (c) what are the details regarding all briefing materials on the cost and logistics of this transfer?

(Return tabled)

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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● (1520)

[English]

AGRICULTURAL GROWTH ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to amend certain Acts relating to agriculture and agri-food, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River has seven minutes to complete his speech.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to use my remaining time at this point. I will remind you that I am sharing my time with the member for Compton—Stanstead.

Let me say very briefly, from the three minutes before the S. O. 31s, that we do farm in northern Ontario and agriculture is an important part of our economy in northern Ontario. I like to remind all the members whenever I can that the Prairies begin in my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River, and farming is a critical part of what we do.

It is my pleasure to speak to the bill. In my remaining time, I would like to speak to two things. One is about plant breeders' rights as they appear in the bill. The other is about one of the good things that appears in the bill, and that is improvements to the advanced payments system.

I would also like to talk about the advanced payments program because it is an important program for farmers who live in my riding.

Bill C-18 would make changes to nine different pieces of legislation, some of which we support and some which pose significant concerns.

First, we are troubled by the sweeping powers that are granted to the minister, which is always a concern, including the power in the regulations to unconditionally exempt farmers' rights and privileges on a case-by-case basis.

I find it interesting that the government refers to plant breeders' rights, but talks about farmers' privileges. We on this side happen to believe that these are farmers' rights, not privileges. For some people, that might be splitting hairs, but there is a big difference between rights and privileges.

The Plant Breeders' Rights Act moves Canada toward the ratification of the 1991 model law of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. This has been coming for some time. From 1991 until now is a long period of time. It expands the rights afforded to plant breeders for the varieties they develop and increases the places along the value chain where plant breeders can collect royalties. That will come up in the advanced payments section when I chat about that.

Bill C-18 includes new exclusive rights for plant breeders such as reproduction, conditioning, sale, export or import, repeated use to produce commercially another plant variety if the repetition is necessary for that purpose, and stocking for the purpose of any of the protected acts.

The term of the grant to the plant breeders rights has been increased in some cases to 25 years, in the case of trees and vines, for example, and includes a new clause which grants, and I alluded to this before, farmers' privileges, allowing farmers to save seed and condition seed for purposes of production and reproduction on their own farm.

As I said, we would have preferred to get rid of one of the grey areas in the bill. In my previous comments, I referred to the fact that farmers' privileges should actually be farmers' rights. It is important to note that this privilege was not extended to the storing of seed or the sale of harvested material from protected seed. The government adopted an amendment to include conditioning, but we believe this is still not explicit enough and leaves this area grey.

Bill C-18 also would grant CFIA the ability to make changes through regulation, to which circumstances and classes of farmers and varieties would be covered under the farmers' privileges. It would protect the right of researchers to use patented materials as the basis for developing a new variety or for another research use.

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It would make a number of other changes, but because of my limited time, I will say that we have some major concerns regarding the clauses that deal with farmers' privilege. These should be farmers' rights, not privileges. I cannot emphasize that enough.

• (1525)

The bill does not adequately clarify or protect the fullest of activities that producers have called for, such as exchanging, cleaning and selling. Therefore, it remains a concern.

Let me reiterate that there are some good things in this bill, and I would like to highlight one, particularly for the farmers in my riding, which are the changes to the advance payments program. For those who do not know, the advance payments program is a financial loan guarantee program that gives producers easier access to credit through cash advances. This program provides producers with a cash advance on the value of their agricultural products during a specific period. This improves the cash flow of producers throughout the year and helps them meet their financial obligations so they can benefit from the best market conditions.

Essentially, the advance payments program has been expanded. Because there are a lot of beef farmers in my riding, there is one section that is particularly important. What this expanded access to the advance payments program does is allow for regulatory changes to cover breeding animals under the program, which, hopefully, can result in more opportunities for farmers to access the program. Animals that are or were used as breeding animals were not previously included under this program, so it is particularly heartening to see this part in the bill.

It also increases flexibility for producers on a number of fronts, including security arrangements, proof of sale and means of repayment. Not all of the people who appeared before committee were pleased with this bill, though a number were. There were mixed results. There are some things the New Democrats certainly support, but some things we do not.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my hon. colleague, I represent a very large farming region in northern Ontario and there are producers who have a real interest in new crop varieties as agriculture moves north. There is also a rise in niche markets and citizens are very interested in finding out where their food comes from. They are taking the politics of food and food security very seriously.

The issue of plant breeders' rights, the corporate rights, that are being protected instead of the tradition for years and years of farmers' rights to save seed, to use seed and share seed is something that is completely undermined in this bill. Where I come from, farmers certainly have a lot to mistrust government about, but they really do not trust the minister to make decisions. This bill would allow the minister to decide what rights farmers would have based on whatever lobbyist he hears from with corporate interests.

How do the farmers in my hon. colleague's region respond to the fact that the government is putting farmers' rights into the hands of the minister to decide what is kept and what will be rejected?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between farmers' rights and farmers' privileges, and we prefer to think of them as farmers' rights.

One of the problems we have with the farmers' privilege part of this bill is it means that plant breeders could potentially generate revenue on a farmer's entire production, not just on the initial seeds that have been sold to the farmer, but throughout the whole production cycle rather than just on the seed produced to grow the crop. This could significantly impact the profit margins of farmers.

Some farmers in my riding say that maybe that is not all bad, that if they want to end load the royalties to the actual result of the crop, maybe that is a good thing if the crop fails. Maybe they would save some money. That is certainly a consideration. I have talked to a couple of farmers about that. If farmers harvest poor crops, they would pay less on the end point.

The worry is that it just will not be one or the other; it may be all along the whole line, not only royalties on the seeds and the harvest, but everything in between. That is a real concern because it is one of those grey areas that I talked about in my speech.

• (1530)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it bears repeating just how important our agricultural community in what it does, whether it is feeding the world or providing economic activity in Canada. Agriculture is a powerhouse in driving our economy. It plays a very critical role.

I cannot help but think about whether the government has lost some opportunities here. Fairly significant changes are being put in place.

I note that a number of amendments were brought forward at the committee stage. The government did not take seriously some of those amendments, whether they were Liberal or NDP, and we have fallen short of improving the legislation. Would member like to provide some comment on that?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, the member from Manitoba is absolutely right. What he was alluding to, and what he was maybe a little too polite to say in the House, was that since 2011, no opposition amendments, whether Liberal or NDP, have been accepted by the government.

Canadians understand and expect that one of the things we do in this place is try to make legislation better. That is why it gets voted on. That is why it goes to committee for amendments.

We had a number of amendments, as did the Liberals, to improve this bill. The end result, and not just with this bill but with a whole host of other bills, is that there will be challenges in court. There will be changes by regulation, not by legislation. Legislation, of course, would come back to the House, but regulation would be in the hands of the minister.

We are doing Canadians a disservice by not looking seriously at the amendments that the opposition brings forward on these bills.

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Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to correct the record.

When I answered a question from the member for Burnaby—Douglas earlier today in question period, I said that projects would only proceed if they were not safe for Canadians and safe for the environment.

I should have said that projects will only proceed if they are safe for Canadians and safe for the environment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the contribution of my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River to this debate. This is a debate that has been going on for some time now and that we would have liked to see extended, but every time there is a debate on agriculture, there are closure motions. This is the 82nd time allocation motion. Congratulations once again. Sadly, this affects a bill that deals with such an important subject, namely agriculture.

Across Canada, from coast to coast, generation after generation of farmers work hard, carrying on a farming tradition as workers who devote themselves to their country and their land. They carry on their traditions and help feed the Canadian people. Well, this bill is called the agricultural growth act.

How could the government forget so many players—especially in the regions, where we see the diversity, vitality and tenacity of Canadians—in the development of a bill to support a local community, whose specific characteristics make Canada such a great country?

We must admit that this is a great country. It will be an even greater country in 2015 when the NDP takes over the House and we will finally see bills that are more pragmatic and down to earth.

Bill C-18 amends nine laws, which makes this an omnibus bill. All these laws, some more complex than others, deserve our attention, and we should examine some of the details.

This bill will amend the Plant Breeders' Rights Act, including the duration and scope of those rights; the Feeds Act; the Fertilizers Act; the Seeds Act; the Health of Animals Act; and the Plant Protection Act—that is starting to add up to a lot of laws—the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act; the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act; and finally, the Farm Debt Mediation Act.

Farm debt is one of the most serious concerns in the agricultural sector. In some Canadian regions, debt is becoming a problem, as is the transfer of family farms to the next generation so that farms can continue to feed people, because that is what this is about.

Where I come from, there are beef and hog producers. There are other operations that are developing, such as those that raise deer, bison, boar, ostrich and even alpaca. They all need grain to ensure that their animals are healthy, and they need to follow the food safety rules to ensure that their livestock is fit for consumption.

Farmers have a lot of concerns. This bill seems to dismiss those concerns and focuses instead on large-scale business.

● (1535)

The government wants to ensure that Canada meets international trade criteria and, as a result, it is forgetting an entire segment of our agricultural production, which serves the local economy extremely well. Communities across the country have struggled to live and survive from farming through the years, and they are still alive. I cannot believe that my riding of Compton—Stanstead is the only one where traditional farming still exists.

Given our concerns, the NDP proposed 16 amendments that would have protected farmers' rights and made for fair rules for breeders and farmers. Those amendments would have made the regulatory process more democratic. However, once again, the government has introduced a bill that puts more power in the minister's hands. The minister will be able to decide what is and is not okay from his office.

A minister should use his power only as a last resort for resolving problems in his administrative area. However, now, he can intervene any time he wants. That does not make sense. We have been seeing this sort of thing since 2011. All of the senior ministers have given themselves more power. That is not right. The departments have employees who are there to do the work, and they do it very well. The Conservatives have made cuts to a number of departments, which have resulted in cuts to front-line staff. What is more, they had the audacity to eliminate the jobs of people who communicate with and provide services to the public. There will be more decision makers.

Perhaps someone should listen to people, to the farmers in this case, to find out what they really need.

We therefore cannot support this bill since we believe that it does not provide sufficient protection for farmers and gives too much discretionary power to the minister.

Agricultural biodiversity has been eroding for decades, not just in Canada, but also around the world. Biodiversity is disappearing because agricultural production systems are being homogenized—we are seeing more and more specialized crops and livestock—and globalization is leading to standardization. Everyone knows this as the concept of international trade. People want to be able to participate in international trade and meet demand. Everything is made to be as productive and fast as possible, and diversity is ignored. I do not know if my colleagues are aware, but there have been cases in the animal kingdom where everything has become sterile, or non-operational, and nothing is working anymore. This is what will happen, since nature has its own plan. If biodiversity in one sector is decreased—whether we are talking about canola, soya or another crop—sooner or later there will be consequences, and they will be serious.

By its very design, this bill falls well short of promoting food sovereignty, with which we should be extremely concerned. There was a time when 80% to 90% of what Canadians had in their pantries came from Canada. Now it is around 25% or 20%. That percentage is going down. The food comes from foreign holdings; it no longer belongs to the farmers themselves.

Farmers are the cornerstone of our food system and, as I was saying, they contribute significantly to our local economies. The NDP believes that they must continue being the drivers of their respective economies across Canada—not just in one corner of the country, but all across Canada. We want farmers to be able to earn a decent living.

Canadians deserve better, more pragmatic policies, and that is what the NDP will propose in 2015. We are ready.

• (1540)

Pragmatism is the word of the day, and it is nowhere to be found in this bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the NDP will be voting against the legislation.

When we look at the legislation, we agree that there is a need for some amendments that would make the bill stronger and more favourable to our farmers. Having said that, even with the current deficiencies and the government's unwillingness to bring in some amendments, we still feel that it is in farmers' best interest to see the legislation go forward.

Is there something specific within the legislation that NDP members believe needs to be deleted for them to support it?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

There is a real need to shorten the patent protection period, unless there is a way to ensure the viability of products for producers, who must be able to save their seeds. They also must be able to reseed and commercialize them. For a small producer, that is always the most difficult part.

In this case, certain varieties will be protected for much too long, and a small producer would be unable to make ends meet. On top of that, farmers in many regions of the country are not financially stable.

• (1545)

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead spoke passionately about a topic he loves, agriculture. This is a very important issue for the people of Compton—Stanstead.

These rural ridings are important because they allow ridings such as mine, in the heart of downtown Quebec City, to appreciate the artisan products of our various local producers, who do an outstanding job. We hope they continue to stand out both here at home, of course, and outside our borders.

To conclude, I would ask him to talk some more about his passion for the producers of Compton—Stanstead and tell us about what worries them the most.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, when the government was drafting its agricultural growth act, it should have thought about farmers' markets and organic foods. There is growing demand for these, both regionally and globally. Enabling our farmers to do more in these sectors would result in significant productivity gains in

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terms of international trade. For that to happen, we need good co-operation between Canada and the provinces.

Farmers have repeatedly called for infrastructure and tools to enhance local access to their products. That is true of all regions in Canada, but especially of Compton—Stanstead. Compton is a small municipality of just 2,500 residents, but it has 32 producers of cheese, wine, beef, pork, yogurt and so on.

Producers exchange these truly amazing products amongst themselves, and that synergy is important. Bill C-18 does not mention synergy anywhere. All it deals with is export. I think that is a mistake because it leaves out a significant segment of our local economy.

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the presentation by the member opposite. Obviously, he is passionate about the issue of agriculture and plant genetics.

One of the things the member expressed concern about in response to a question by another member, which does not seem to be accurate, was that it was very important to him and farmers that they can grow and trade their own seed. That in fact is allowed, unless one signs a contract disallowing that with the company providing the seed. However, that is clearly in the bill now. I do not understand exactly what his concern was.

I would like to follow-up on the question by the Liberal member who asked if the member could list one or two things in the act that the member would like to see removed. I would add to that question and ask if he could list one or two things in this legislation that he would in fact support.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I would rather conclude with what is missing. This bill lacks measures to rally farmers from sea to sea, to ensure that everyone will benefit.

As it stands, only big corporations will benefit. That is a real shame because all Canadians should benefit from the kind of momentum we have going now. As I said, we should use that momentum to ensure that all producers can get their products on store shelves close to home.

• (1550)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to express my enthusiastic support for Bill C-18. I support the bill because it stands to build a stronger farm gate, that is, the total amount of money generated by farmers across this great country.

Bill C-18 would achieve this largely through amendments to the Agricultural Marketing Products Act and the Farm Debt Mediation Act.

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Agriculture in Canada is a progressive, world-class business. The men and women who work out in the fields today do much more than drive tractors, plant seed and raise farm animals. They also create jobs and drive economic growth while producing the food we eat every day. This may not always be top-of-mind for most Canadians, but it should be.

Our government appreciates that farmers are essential to our economy and to our overall well-being as Canadians. This is part of the reason that we continue to open new markets and sign new free trade agreements with other countries.

In 2013, the value of Canada's agriculture and agri-food exports hit a record high, topping \$50 billion. The agriculture and agri-food industry, like any other, faces its share of challenges, but it is a great time for Canada's farming and food-production businesses. Demand is strong and the outlook is positive, with a growing world population hungry for top-quality Canadian products.

Our government is committed to innovating and cutting red tape so that our farmers can spend more time on their core business and less time filling out forms.

Bill C-18 proposes amendments that would give producers the tools they need to grow their businesses so they may continue to drive economic growth and feed the world. The amendments are informed by extensive consultations with producers and industry representatives from across the country. Canada's producers asked for legislative and regulatory improvements that would support long-term growth, and Bill C-18 proposes to deliver these improvements.

Producers continuously strive to improve their businesses, and they rightly expect government to do the same with the programs we administer, such as the Advance Payments Program, or APP. The APP gives farmers access to the bridge financing they often need to remain solvent while their seed grows into marketable crops, or their newborn animals reach maturity.

Under that program, the government backs the cash advances provided to producers by more than 60 program administrators across Canada. These advances provide farmers with the breathing room they need to get maximum value for their products. It gives them the freedom to sell when the market is right, rather than when their bills are due.

A farmer may access a cash advance of up to \$400,000, with a quarter of that, or \$100,000, being interest free. Since the government guarantees the advances, farmers benefit from extremely low interest rates. Each year, Canadian producers access around \$2 billion worth of cash advances under the program.

While the current APP works well, we consulted with stakeholders to identify potential improvements. These consultations directly informed amendments included in Bill C-18. In essence, the amendments proposed in Bill C-18 would give Canadian farmers a more flexible, predictable tool to manage their cash flows. At the same time, the amendments would cut red tape and improve efficiency.

Bill C-18 proposes changes to two pieces of legislation: the Agricultural Products Marketing Act and the Farm Debt Mediation Act. The changes would simplify delivery and improve access to the

advance payments program. They would improve delivery by allowing for multi-year advance guarantee and repayment agreements with administrators and allow for larger advances in certain cases by providing greater flexibility and options for what will be accepted as security through regulations.

• (1555)

The changes would provide flexibility by allowing certain breeding animals to be eligible under the program through regulations. They would adjust the rules related to repayment of advances, producers in default, default penalties and stays of default. They would streamline the process under the Farm Debt Mediation Act, helping farmers reach agreements with their creditors and resolve their financial difficulties—especially in cases involving the repayment of advances under the advance payments program.

The House Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food conducted a thorough review of the proposed legislation. The committee heard from a number of witnesses, including many representatives of industry associations. Strong support for the proposed legislation was voiced. One witness, Mr. Gary Stanford, president of the Grain Growers of Canada, said:

The proposed amendments will create a one-stop shop, simplifying the process by giving farmers the ability to obtain their advance through the administrator, allowing for multi-year advance repayment agreements, flexible under repayment; broadened eligibility requirements; and enhanced security options.

Similarly, Mr. Rick Bergmann, vice-chair of the Canadian Pork Council, said:

Canadian hog producers see value in the Advance Payments Program and view the changes to the Agricultural Marketing Act as an improvement. Steps that can reduce the administrative burden and cutting costs for participating can make a difference, and we encourage that to continue on.

During the consultations that informed Bill C-18, many stakeholders asked for more flexibility so they can grow their businesses.

Bill C-18 delivers on that, with less red tape, more choice for securing advances through regulations, greater flexibility in repaying advances, and single-window delivery.

Our producers want to stay ahead of the curve. Bill C-18 would help them proactively manage business risks and foster a sustainable, adaptable and competitive farm gate.

It is crucial to recognize that this benefits not only farmers and producers, but also every man, woman and child in this country. When agricultural entrepreneurs thrive, they harness innovation, add value, generate jobs and drive growth right across this great country. We all benefit.

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Let me further explain why there is a pressing need for the proposed legislation. With the arrival of new agricultural production techniques and new developments in science, the legislative base for agricultural products must keep pace, especially since our international trading partners have already modernized their legislation. We need the agricultural growth act because it would provide the legislative backbone for growth. If Canada's farmers—along with our agriculture and agri-food sector—are to maintain their competitive edge on the global stage, they need 21st-century tools. Canada must keep pace with the modern world, and to do this we must help our farmers grow their businesses.

To illustrate, allow me to touch on some of the key changes outlined in Bill C-18, beginning with plant breeders' rights. Bill C-18 proposes to bring the laws that govern plant breeders' rights in Canada in line with those of our international competitors. This would allow our farmers to access the latest crop varieties and keep pace with their competitors. At the same time, Bill C-18 proposes to explicitly recognize the traditional practice of saving and reusing seed from crops grown on their own land, known as farmers' privilege.

Let me be clear. With the proposed amendments to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act, Canada's farmers would still be able to clean, condition and store the seeds of protected varieties for replanting on their own land.

● (1600)

The overall impact of the proposed amendments would be: greater investment in plant breeding in Canada; increased access to high-yield varieties for Canadian farmers; and more choice and value for Canadian consumers.

Another aspect of Bill C-18 is the licensing and registration of feed and fertilizer manufacturers. It proposes new, broader controls on the safety of Canada's agricultural inputs through licensing or registration of feed and fertilizer manufacturers. The proposed amendments would align Canadian legislation with that of our trading partners. The amendments would also help Canadian feed and fertilizer industries maintain their export markets, especially the United States.

Bill C-18 proposes to authorize the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to license or register fertilizer and animal feed operators and facilities that import or sell products across provincial or international borders. This is in addition to the current system, where feed and fertilizer products are registered product by product.

Once again, the proposed legislation respects the interests of farmers. This amendment would apply to businesses that sell animal feed and fertilizer products across provincial and international borders, not to farmers who make and use these products on their own farms.

Of course, any licensing regime requires regulations to operate effectively. This government is committed to collaborating closely with industry stakeholders to develop these regulations. Bill C-18 also proposes to improve a key aspect of the approval process: the consideration of foreign reviews and analysis.

Another amendment proposed in Bill C-18 is designed to promote innovation and to cut the red tape associated with registering new

agricultural products. To achieve this, the proposed change would further clarify and confirm the agency's authority to consider foreign reviews and data evaluation during the approval or registration of agricultural products that are new to the Canadian market. This is in addition to ongoing Canadian reviews and analyses. In other words, these reviews would be informed by even more scientific data, which leads to sound decisions. This facilitates an efficient and effective approval process, so that Canada's farmers benefit from the latest scientific research from around the world and keep pace with the competition.

Bill C-18 complements private member's Motion No. 460, which this House agreed with in April 2010. Motion No. 460 asked that equivalent foreign scientific research be considered. The approval process for regulated items needs to keep pace with innovation and leading edge science so our producers are not at an economic disadvantage.

What Motion No. 460 did not ask is that an approval in a foreign jurisdiction would immediately allow that product to be automatically used in Canada. The same applies for Bill C-18.

The foreign data can supplement the information used in the assessment of the product, but it must be considered in the Canadian context.

Bill C-18 also proposes to modernize Canada's border controls for imported agricultural products. The proposed agricultural growth act would give CFIA inspectors the authority to order imported shipments of feeds, fertilizers or seeds out of Canada if they do not meet legal requirements. This is similar to the way that imported plants and animals may be ordered out of the country if they do not comply with regulatory requirements.

Under the current process, after the seizure of illegal products related to animal feeds, seeds or fertilizers, the CFIA either negotiates a solution or court proceedings are initiated. This process works, but at times, Canada must pay to dispose of the illegal products that have been seized. It's not difficult to appreciate that it would be more efficient to simply require the importer to remove the products from Canada. Bill C-18 proposes that CFIA inspectors be authorized to order non-compliant products out of Canada.

● (1605)

However, if the product poses no risk to safety, and the inspector is satisfied that the compliance can be fixed in a reasonable time, they may allow the product to be brought into compliance in Canada. This gives the inspector the needed authority to keep non-compliant products out of Canada, but the flexibility to allow certain issues to be fixed here.

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This proposed amendment would provide the CFIA with stronger tools to more efficiently fulfill its mandate to protect Canada's plant and animal resource base. It would provide additional reassurance to Canadian consumers that imported agricultural products meet Canada's stringent requirements and would level the competitive playing field for our Canadian farmers.

This is further evidence that this government listens carefully to Canada's farmers and producers. I wish to point out that the proposed Agricultural Growth Act reflects extensive stakeholder consultations carried out over the past few years. We are committed to additional consultation.

Upon receiving royal assent, some of the changes in this act would come into force almost immediately, while others would be phased in incrementally or following regulatory amendments.

Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry depends on an effective, innovative and nimble legislative framework, one that reflects 21st-century realities and can readily adapt to a changing industry landscape, while providing a consistent and effective approach.

Ultimately, this is what Bill C-18 is about: helping Canada's farmers and producers make a larger and more valuable contribution to this country's prosperity.

This is precisely why I encourage all parliamentarians to give the proposed Agricultural Growth Act their careful attention and move it forward, so we will have the legislative backbone to continue providing Canada's farmers and food processors with the tools they need to drive new economic growth and compete in the global economy.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP amendment would have ensured that new crop varieties are just as good as, if not better than, the existing varieties.

Could the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière explain why this amendment was rejected?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Any new variety has to go through a process and comply with the regulations. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency can also look after this, but it is important that the entire process be followed to ensure that the variety is in line with our requirements.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was kind of the member to make this speech. It was particularly interesting because he himself is a farmer.

When I was born, the world population was 3 billion. It is now around 7 billion, and when I die—hopefully not tomorrow morning—it will probably be around 10 billion. Unfortunately, it will not be easy to feed all these people. We have already depleted some stocks. We are seeing desertification. Unfortunately, it seems as though the legislation proposed by the government prioritizes giving the big companies control over the manufacturing and distribution of food, instead of ensuring that farmers can earn an income.

Does the member not think it would be reasonable to split this omnibus bill into a series of bills that could be voted on

individually? We could then see that farmers want nothing to do with some aspects of his bill. We should allow these farmers to block some aspects of this omnibus bill that are very harmful.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

In his question, he spoke about the agricultural challenge that the world will face in the coming years, which has also demonstrated that there is a massive market for Canadian producers. Canada has more than 160 million acres. We can feed far more than 35 million people.

Canada will be able to benefit from an extraordinary market in the future, and that bodes well. This means that, in general, there is a good outlook for the future of agriculture in Canada.

• (1610)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles just asked a question about an amendment proposed by the NDP. However, there was a second part to this amendment, namely the idea of protecting access to public and heritage seeds.

I am mentioning this because in Kahnawake there is someone named Steve McCumber who is known as the guardian of the plants. He saves heirloom seeds and traditional varieties of three plants that are very traditional for the Iroquois. They are known as the three sisters: squash, corn and beans. This is very important for aboriginal cultures and for Iroquois culture in particular.

Another example comes from Montreal, a few years ago, when a variety of melon was rediscovered. The species was grown in the 19th century and was very productive. Once the island of Montreal became more urban, production stopped. However, it produced well and perhaps we could reproduce all of those varieties I just mentioned.

However, I am wondering why this amendment was rejected when it could mean preserving heirloom varieties by, for example, protecting public research instead of focusing only on research conducted by large companies.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting question.

At the global level, Canada is already involved in the genetic preservation of plant species. That is very important given that we do not know whether certain genetic characteristics will be required in the future. If that is the case, we would be able to find them in this bank.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his wonderful speech.

I have a comment related to a question from my colleague from Hochelaga.

Government Orders

She talked about how important public research is. As we all know, the Conservative government has cut 700 research positions at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada since 2013.

I would like my colleague to comment on what kind of message the government's decision to cut 700 research and innovation positions sends about the importance of public research in Canada and the respect it deserves.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Together with private corporations in the agri-food sector, the Government of Canada is also working in sectors involved in cutting-edge research to develop new foods and new varieties and in food processing. It is a leader in the field. We are pursuing research in partnership with the private sector.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, just to build on that, does this mean that the government prefers applied research to pure research? That seems to be a trend in several fields lately.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, in Canada, we have a history of working closely with the agricultural and food processing sectors. That has been a tradition for about a hundred years, and we will stay on that path because the challenges the agricultural sector faces every year are major issues for our country and the whole world.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with great interest to the position of the government on this particular piece of legislation and remain puzzled by its obstinacy against the amendments that my colleagues have brought forward.

What puzzles me is that when we are talking about other issues, for example, child care or support for the family, the line from the Conservatives is always, “We do not want big entities to decide the fate of our families”, yet here they want big government to decide whether or not farmers should or should not have the right to keep their own seeds and share them.

I can remember back in the 1970s when I was working on dialogues on the preservation of agricultural land and of the agricultural economy in Alberta, it was the time of a big scare in India. There was a single strain of rice and the harvest was a disaster.

Therefore, I am wondering about this one-sided mindset of protecting the big corporations that want to sell just one seed, instead of encouraging our farmers to keep their heritage seeds and share those. Why is the government not listening to the farmers on the importance of having diversity in crops?

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is very interesting.

The market reality is that farmers choose the varieties they are going to plant based on the financial performance they can achieve. Considering the 160 million acres in Canada, farmers like to be able to deliver a product that is in demand somewhere in the world. That is very important, because our country is a very significant net exporter.

We are very proud to be contributing to the stability of global food security.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, can the member explain the changes made to the part related to the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act since the first time it was before the House?

Why did we not discuss this in committee, particularly the change in clause 136?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, that is a very technical question.

Since I would not want to mislead my colleague, I will have to get back to her on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Québec, Consumer Protection.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Timmins—James Bay.

It is truly an honour for me to rise to speak to Bill C-18 for the third time. It is an omnibus bill, and I had a chance to examine it at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, where we did a thorough study and heard from many witnesses. It is therefore a real honour for me to talk about Bill C-18 again here today.

This is a rather complex bill. It is an omnibus bill that amends nine existing laws. We agree with several aspects of the bill. It does include some improvements, but as it is written, it could lead to many problems, which were identified at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I repeat, we cannot support this bill because there are gaps. It does not address all the needs of the agricultural sector. If you aim big, why not do things right? The witnesses mentioned that there were things missing in this bill. It is not enough to align our legislation with UPOV 1991 so that, as though by magic, everything is fixed. We have to consider mistakes made by other countries and have a good understanding of the Canadian reality to ensure that the changes we make are as comprehensive as possible. Unfortunately, as drafted, Bill C-18 does not do that.

In order to ensure that everyone understands what the bill is all about, I will quickly recap what Bill C-18 will do and the risks it entails.

First of all, Bill C-18 will move Canada from UPOV 1978 to UPOV 1991. This has a number of consequences for the Plant Breeders' Rights Act. According to the government, the UPOV 1991 treaty will give breeders additional protection and promote private investment.

The most important changes will expand the scope of plant breeders' rights, provide interim protection for a new variety and extend the term of protected rights.

Government Orders

Essentially, breeders now have the following exclusive rights: the right to reproduce propagating material; the right to condition, sell, export or import material; the right to make repeated use of material to produce commercially another plant variety if the repetition is necessary; and the right to stock propagating material for the purpose of exercising other plant breeders' rights. When we look at this list it is hard to see where there might be a problem. The problem is that the Conservative government has extended the powers of plant breeders so much, in order to promote private investment, that they are at a much greater advantage compared to farmers.

Farmers have even lost the right to clean, trade and resell their seeds. What is more, plant breeders have the power to charge royalties to farmers at any time without any regard for their harvests. What we are being told is not reassuring: the competition among breeders will govern the balance of power and everything will be just fine.

It makes me wonder: why not ensure from the get-go that everything will be just fine by taking the valuable advice of our witnesses, protecting farmers' ancestral rights and limiting breeders' powers to charge royalties?

To sum up this part, Bill C-18 might help us move ahead by harmonizing the Plant Breeders' Rights Act with UPOV '91 because it protects intellectual property and encourages innovation. The problem is that the way Bill C-18 is drafted, it might also set us back. In fact, it rolls back farmers' rights.

● (1620)

What is more, given the expansion of plant breeders' rights under Bill C-18, it is likely that farmers will face increased litigation.

However, producers may well be on an extremely uneven financial playing field with plant breeders. There are no provisions in Bill C-18 to ensure that legal fees do not impede farmers' defence in such cases.

As it happened in Germany, this bill's lack of clarity could lead to a number of legal loopholes that will clog our courts and place an additional burden on our farmers. In other words, Bill C-18 does not provide sufficient protection for farmers against the potential abuse of power by breeders. It is not balanced enough.

I would like to come back to the changes made in order to pass and amend legislation without going through Parliament. Now, laws can be amended through incorporation by reference. That means that any document can be included in the regulations associated with any of these acts through incorporation by reference. In other words, the current government can amend the act without Parliament's consent. This is nothing new. We have seen it in a number of bills introduced by this government.

The government and its senior officials justified this addition by saying that it was needed to ensure the act could be adjusted in response to various contingencies. Although I appreciate the government and its senior officials' commitment to efficiency, the amendments made to a law through incorporation by reference should be voted on or studied by the House or at least the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. That would be a good idea.

What is more, Bill C-18 grants the Governor in Council the ability to make significant changes to the governing of various products, including to safety provisions, without the parliamentary oversight of legislative change. For example, the Governor in Council could establish regulations concerning the manufacturing, sale and shipping of products between provinces without even consulting the provinces or the House of Commons.

These strengthened powers are in addition to the changes made to the minister's authority in various laws. From now on, the minister may, subject to the regulations, suspend, cancel or renew a registration or licence and exempt someone or something from one or more regulations. The minister can do what he wants without any conditions. At the risk of repeating myself, this type of power could politicize the agricultural industry.

If it so chooses, the party in power could favour one company or even an entire sector over another, without the consent of Parliament. We know that it can sometimes be cumbersome to present and approve these changes in the House, but this process is a necessary part of democracy. The agricultural sector must absolutely not become subject or vulnerable to political interests.

In conclusion, I want to say that I support innovation and the protection of intellectual property, but I believe we must ensure that all Canadian farmers and public sector researchers are protected. I want to be sure that Canadians have access to our agricultural heritage and that they can take advantage of it. We need to ensure that new seeds are just as good—if not better—than existing ones, and we need to protect universal access to our common heritage of public seeds.

We also need to ensure that farmers or their representatives have a say about how intellectual property laws are applied and about any regulatory changes that would affect them, by eliminating the minister's authority to regulate amendments and the rights to exemptions.

Although some claim that this bill is necessary for the agricultural sector, I cannot ignore the fact that this bill will create new problems, especially since witnesses told us the same thing and they suggested solutions. That is why we presented 16 amendments. It is very sad to see such a lack of openness on the part of this government.

However, I can say that I am very proud of the work our party has done and of the fact that we are against Bill C-18.

● (1625)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed to hear that the NDP, the official opposition, will be opposing this bill.

Historically, in the House, we have always voted unanimously to help our farmers and the agrifood processing industry. There is always something that can be improved in agriculture, which is constantly evolving. We need to adapt from year to year.

Today, we proposed a bill that will enable our farmers to face the challenges of the 21st century. We should all vote together to help them.

Government Orders

I would like to know why the official opposition does not want to vote in favour of a bill that will help Canadian agriculture.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for that great question.

This omnibus bill will amend nine different laws. Nonetheless, we support several aspects of Bill C-18. That is why our party decided to send it for study by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, in the hopes that there would be meaningful debate and a balanced number of witnesses from both sides.

Even the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food himself, when he appeared before the committee, said that there were changes to be made to the bill. We had reason to believe that the government would listen and not turn a deaf ear, as is often the case.

Unfortunately, the government rejected our 16 common-sense amendments that received support from many witnesses. What is more, the majority of witnesses and people from the agriculture and agri-food industry who support this bill had suggestions about how it could be improved.

I do not know why this government is so closed to any proposed suggestions for improving this bill. It is unfortunate.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether one is a farmer on the Prairies or in the provinces of Quebec or Ontario, there is a sense that we need to make legislative changes that would enable farmers to, for example, compete in the world market going forward. There is no doubt from the presentations made by farmers and other stakeholders in committee that there is a need to make several changes. The NDP and the Liberals brought forward amendments, and ideas were generated from stakeholders at the committee stage.

My question for the member is related to the overall package before us today. It seems to me that most farmers would be supportive of this bill, albeit feeling concern over many different areas and desiring to see some amendments.

Are there specific amendments that the NDP was proposing at the committee stage that the member would have liked to have seen pass, as a minimum, that would have allowed for her party to support the legislation?

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. I doubt I would have time to list all 16 of our amendments in one minute. Most importantly, we wanted to take away the minister's right to secretly and undemocratically revoke farmers' privilege. People are talking about this issue not only in Quebec, but in all the other provinces too.

I also received other petitions supporting our amendments to Bill C-18. It is important to strengthen farmers' privilege and ensure a better balance.

All we were asking for was a proper balance and that it be put in black and white that our farmers can save, clean and trade their own seeds. We also wanted farmers to be consulted, because this bill is

one of the most important bills on agriculture. Basically, one of our amendments called on the government to do more consultation with the industry.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a great honour to rise and represent the great people of Timmins—James Bay. It is a region that continues to grow in agricultural potential. It is part of the key backbone of our economy. People think of the north for its incredible mining strength. In Timmins—James Bay, with the massive gold mines, copper mines, and now diamond mines, we have a lot to be proud of in terms of mineral exploitation and the forestry industry, which opened up our region over 100 years ago. However, agriculture, particularly in the Timiskaming region, has been a mainstay.

What I have seen over the last 20 years is growth, as farms are moving further north. They are moving north into areas where there was once thriving farming; however, they could never quite make it because of the plant varieties of the day and the cold weather. The change in climate has changed some of the aspects of farming. There are new technologies, where they put tile drainage in now. In plots of land, the ability to get a crop off before the frost has increased dramatically, and there are the kinds of plant yields that we are seeing.

In the New Democratic Party, we have a real interest in making sure that farmers have the tools they need to make agriculture succeed in the 21st century.

However, there is another element in our region that I notice, and it is an issue around the world in terms of the changing relationship with farming. People in urban areas want to know where their food has come from. People want to have food security. People are concerned about GMOs. People want to have it on the labelling. People are very concerned about the use of neonicotinoids, the disappearance of the bee population, and the devastating effects that will have on our environment. They are very concerned about the corporate lobby that has the ear of the Conservative government, which is stonewalling action on these issues. Canadians feel that they have a right to participate in these issues. When they look at the issue of plant breeders' rights, Canadians say these are issues that matter to them.

It is not just that agriculture is getting bigger. We have heard for years that agriculture is getting bigger and becoming an economy of scale. We are now also seeing the emergence of niche markets. It is not just in the north, but it is right across Canada. The niche markets are responding to the issues and the very interest we see from the public toward food security, local foods, regional foods, and alternative foods.

Government Orders

The issue of striking the balance between ensuring the larger agricultural interest and that we have diversity is very important. Unfortunately, this bill has failed the fundamental test, which is getting the balance right. There are many elements in this bill that are laudable, but this is an omnibus bill, like many of the Conservative bills, so the Conservatives have shoved all manner of things into it.

One of the issues that we heard about again and again from the people that we spoke to was on the issue of what the government calls “farmers' privilege”. We call it “farmers' rights”. It is the ancient right to save seeds, to reuse seeds, and to try different seed varieties, versus the plant breeders' rights.

For the folks back home who do not know much about the industry, plant breeders' rights really mean corporate rights. We are looking at the protection of the corporate rights for intellectual property for the new seed varieties, some of which are GMOs, versus the traditional rights that farmers had to clean, maintain, and trade seeds.

This is not to say that we have an opposition to the kind of research and development that is being done by some very large corporate interests. If they can improve agriculture, this is great, and they are doing it for a bottom line. We get that. However, we noticed that within this bill, the government would continually put the power in the hands of the so-called “rights of the corporate interests” versus the privileges that farmers are supposed to have.

We have attempted to work with the government on fixing the language around that so we could clarify it, because one of the big issues that farmers face is litigation. When they are going up against Monsanto, it litigates. It goes after farmers. It is very territorial about its corporate interests. In amendments, we could have clarified what the farmers have in terms of their rights in saving and reusing seeds.

We noticed that the government has exempted all manner of what it calls “the farmers' privilege” from the legislation, which will now be decided in the minister's office. This means that the minister would give himself the unilateral power to erase the rights that farmers have always had.

•(1635)

This is not a balanced approach, particularly in an age when we see very large corporate lobbyists who have the ear of the minister and of the government. They can just make a phone call. They can go out to Hy's Steakhouse. They can sit around and have a conversation. The average farmer does not have that. He is going to have to trust the goodwill of the minister. Where I come from, our farmers are practical people. Asking them to trust the goodwill of a minister on rights they have always had is not going to fly. Therefore, there are problems with this bill.

Again, this is not to say that we would have opposed this bill in total. We want to fix the bill. That is what legislation is supposed to be. That is what Parliament traditionally has done. When I came here over a decade ago, we sat on committees and heard various amendments brought forward by Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats, who wanted to improve legislation. We do not have to ideologically agree on everything, but we should come out at the end of the day with the best possible legislation.

However, the current government has a policy. Since 2011, with every single amendment that the opposition has brought, the Conservatives have voted it down. The result has been many flawed bills. These are bills that have to be returned from the Senate because they are flawed, that have been rejected time and again because they would not pass a constitutional challenge. Our justice minister has had more recalls of his legislation than the Ford Pinto. It is getting embarrassing.

The new Democrats brought 16 reasonable amendments. Our colleagues in the Liberal brought amendments. Every single one of them was struck down.

One can be elected and be dim-witted; there is nothing in the laws of Canada that says someone cannot be dim-witted and be elected. People can just run for the Conservative Party. They can be defiantly dim-witted, as the current government is when it comes to responding to any questions about its mistakes. However, we see that the members of the government are aggressively and boastfully dim-witted when they stand up time and again in the House and brag that they do not listen to anybody who can improve their legislation. In fact, they will attack us for doing our job. They seem to want to shut down debate time and again. The fact that we bring forward amendments on any manner of bills and they have not thought them through is an outrage. Again, we are trying to help our dim-witted colleagues. This is our job.

I feel like Job sometimes, with the weight that is carried on us to try to help bring our dim-witted colleagues into the light of the 21st century. However, the Conservatives are defiant about this. They will not listen. They will accuse us of all manner of things under the sun, but our job on legislation like this is to respond to the farming communities. It is to respond to the consumers who want food security in Canada, who want a balance between the development of agriculture and the corporate involvement in agriculture in the growing niche markets, the issues of food security, and the fact that people want to have some knowledge of where their food comes from and what is in their food. These are reasonable things, which people from any party could agree on normally. However, under the current government, the Conservatives do not want to listen to anybody other than themselves, or perhaps their lobbyist friends.

In terms of the seed issue, when farmers are buying their seed from a corporate interest, there is a price that is set. Corporations can have a captive market if farmers cannot get alternatives. They are very expensive, and what they are promised in return is the yields. That is important. However, if farmers want to have their own varieties, they cannot trade them; they would be litigated against. They need some defence in terms of establishing the balance, and this is what we were trying to do with our amendments. We were trying to clarify the rules so that farmers are not facing litigation, so the minister does not get to decide what rights the farmers should be able to enjoy. The Conservatives call them privileges, but we call them rights.

Government Orders

I am sorry, but I do not trust the minister to make that decision on behalf of the farmers in my region. This is what Parliament should be doing. It should be in the act and it should be clear. We brought forward 16 fairly straightforward amendments. The Conservatives did not have to accept them all; they could have accepted some. However, as is their policy, they did not accept any. They then cannot understand why people do not support them.

• (1640)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of farmers in the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing. This past weekend I had someone approach me during one of the craft shows to tell me how important it is for us to keep raising the issue about the bee situation, so I want to thank my colleague for raising that during this debate. The debate that he put forward was a balanced approach with respect to what we are seeing, the fact that there are omnibus bills being tabled. We are willing to work with the government, but it is not willing to work with us. I am not on the agriculture committee. However, if I remember correctly, there were 16 amendments that the NDP tabled. We did not just pull these out of our hat; we actually talked to people. We have a lot of farmers in our area. I know that my colleague has hundreds of farmers in his area. Some of them are young farmers who are really trying to make a go at this.

Could my colleague perhaps expand on the importance of having a government that is willing to listen, not only to the lobbyists, but also to the other farmers who are impacted by this in the long run because they are not big farmers?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that when my hon. colleague goes back to Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, which is a very rural region with a lot of agricultural families, people talk about the crisis with respect to neonicotinoids. I hear this in my region. The government will make the fact that the bees are dying off because of the pesticides sound like some kind of extremist talk. The corporate lobbyists have the Conservatives all locked up in their little box.

However, people do care, just like people care about the issue of catastrophic climate change. Any time that we ask a question about climate change in this House, the Conservative backbench all howl with laughter, as if they think they can escape it with the Rapture or something. However, when I go home, people are concerned about this. They see the changing weather patterns. In our agricultural region, people have noticed dramatic changes, even in the last 30 years.

Farming is based on the ability to count on the cycle. There have been some years when we have had enormous success in terms of extra warm summers, but we are seeing more frost coming at odd times. We are seeing an early spring, where it gets very warm and people start to plant and then the snow comes back. These are issues that people are concerned about, and they are looking for leadership. Again, what they see is a government that is boastfully, aggressively, and defiantly dim-witted.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech.

I gave my first speech in the House of Commons in 2011, and it was about the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board. I am sure everyone remembers that because it was a very divisive issue in the House. Farmers' rights, such as the right to associate and to form co-operatives to sell their products, which gave them a degree of power, were being taken away.

Crops have changed a lot. Now farmers are planting a lot of canola instead of wheat.

I would like the member to tell me a little about just how much power is being taken away from farmers and handed to one person, one minister. The minister has the power to exempt, to choose, to exclude. The minister can take farmers' privileges away. In a way, it is one person against farmers, and it is all case by case.

The whole democratic aspect of this is very important to me because this Parliament is supposed to be democratic.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question on the Canadian Wheat Board. Farmers fought to have the power to get their product to market, and the first year after, the farmers could not get their product to market. Welcome to the free market, where one can make more money by shipping oil than shipping grain. Then the government stood up and blamed the train companies and everyone else. The farmers lost a complete bumper crop of grain because of the government's plan to leave farmers on their own. The Wheat Board got grain to market for over 60 years. The first year under the Conservatives, it completely fell apart. That is the beauty of the supposed free market for farmers in this country under the current government.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a little embarrassing to get up after what the previous member was saying. It certainly is beneath me to get involved in that argument, so I will not. I will let him answer to his constituents and to the media and others who might be interested about that kind of behaviour in the House.

I am proud to stand here today in support of Bill C-18, the proposed agricultural growth act. Bill C-18 is about growth. It is about growth of plants and growth of an industry. Canada's farmers certainly know all about the benefits of growth. The double entendre was intended. They recognize that entrepreneurs who successfully harness innovation add value to the economy, create jobs, and stimulate growth right across the country.

We need to keep up the momentum. We need to look toward the future. The agricultural growth act proposes to modernize some of the legislation that governs the industry in our country and to encourage innovation. That is exactly what it does.

Government Orders

The agricultural growth act aims to support the long-term success of Canadian farmers and producers. The current law tends to discourage development, so this change clearly is needed. Farmers know that, and farm groups who represent farmers right across the country know that, and they have given us this message loud and clear.

The amendments proposed to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act would support growth by encouraging investment in plant breeding in Canada and giving farmers greater access to foreign seed varieties. Plant breeders' rights are a form of intellectual property and like any intellectual property, without adequate legal protection, plant breeders' rights have virtually no value. Adequate legal protection enables rights holders to obtain value for their intellectual property. For plant breeders, this means they have control over the sale of the reproductive material, like seeds, cuttings, and other items like that from the new plant varieties they develop.

Plant breeding is an intensive process that requires significant time and investment. It often takes 10 to 12 years for plant breeders to develop a new variety. That is a huge investment in time and money. As it stands today, Canadian law protects plant breeders' rights for 18 years. The agricultural growth act proposes to extend protection to 25 years for trees, vines and any other specified categories and to 20 years for all other crops, unless the breeder chooses to give their rights up earlier. In some cases, that happens. For most cereal crops and field crops, that would be a two-year extension to the current protection.

The agricultural growth act would also allow plant breeders to sell a variety in Canada for up to one year before applying for breeders' rights protection. This would give them time to test the market, to advertise, or even increase the amount of stock they have on hand before filing for legal protection. I have heard from some people in the industry that this is important. At the same time, the agricultural growth act would provide plant breeders with automatic provisional protection for a new plant variety from the date of filing, which would allow them to exercise their rights while applications are pending.

In other words, the bill would give these agriculture innovators the tools they need to protect their investment and would support continued innovation in Canadian agriculture.

The importance of innovation in Canadian agriculture was the focus of an exhaustive report published earlier this year by the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. The committee heard from some 170 witnesses over a period of 14 months. In its report, the committee took a bird's eye view of Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry. The report identifies challenges and obstacles and makes no fewer than 19 recommendations, many of them relating to innovation, and that is no accident.

For instance, recommendation number 7 directly calls for improvements in patent protection. That is what this act does. However, I will come back to the committee report in a moment. First, I want to explain another form of intellectual property protection, plant breeders' rights, which is a specific type of legal protection for new plant varieties.

● (1650)

Trade depends upon trust. We know that. Buyers and sellers will do business only when they can trust the quality and the value of the goods and services to be traded. To build trust and foster trade, countries have long negotiated conventions and free trade agreements. Legal protection for intellectual property rights is often a feature of these conventions. The idea is relatively simple. The parties agree to establish a minimum level of legal protection for property rights. They agree to enforce their own laws on rights protection and to recognize equivalent laws in the countries they want to trade with.

The international convention on plant breeders' rights is known as UPOV, the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. Over 70 countries, including Canada, are members of UPOV. Membership in UPOV allows a country to fulfill its obligations for protecting plant varieties under the World Trade Organization.

Over the years, there have been several updates to the UPOV requirements for plant breeders' rights protection. The current standard is known as UPOV '91. It is important to note, however, that Canada's current legislation does not meet this standard. By that I mean the legislation that is in place right now, because the legislation we are talking about here today has not been passed yet. It meets requirements of the previous version, UPOV 1978. It needs to be updated.

When the standing committee of that other place conducted its study of agriculture, it heard from many witnesses who called on Canada upon to update its legislation so that it would meet the current UPOV '91 standards.

One such witness was Ms. Patty Townsend, chief executive officer of the Canadian Seed Trade Association. She had this to say about this country's failure to meet current UPOV standards:

The consequence [of the non-ratification of UPOV Convention 1991] is twofold. Canadian plant breeders do not have adequate tools to protect their own intellectual property, their own inventions, and they cannot regenerate the funds that are required for reinvestment, but just as important and sometimes even more important is that we cannot attract international genetics or new varieties internationally because companies will not bring their varieties to Canada because we cannot protect them in the same way they are protected in other countries.

That is a quote from Patty Townsend, who has been an effective voice for agriculture on the Hill for a long time.

If we consult the standing committee's report, we will see that recommendation number 8 calls upon Canada to comply with UPOV '91.

The issue of UPOV was also a major focus of the House Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food during its review of Bill C-18. The committee heard from many witnesses critical of Canada's tardiness in ratifying the latest UPOV convention.

One of these witnesses was Chris Andrews, who spoke on behalf of the Canadian Ornamental Horticulture Alliance. Here is some of what he had to say on the topic:

...you may remember when plant breeders' rights were first introduced to Canada in 1991 under the UPOV 78 convention. Unfortunately, after 65 years of efforts, it came too late for the extraordinary Explorer roses, which were developed over the years by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada and were lost to a world that loved them, as we had no protection in those days.

Government Orders

He went on to say:

We had to buy our own plants back. My suggestion is, let's not let that happen again to our new and innovative Canadian-bred varieties.

As Mr. Andrews points out, Canada already knows what can happen when plant breeders' rights are not adequately protected. Explorer Roses are, indeed, a made-in-Canada success story, much like canola, which has really revolutionized and saved field crop farming in western Canada. There is no doubt about that. I know that. It saved my family's family farm. It certainly helped me with my family farm, and it is what is keeping farming farms going today. Canola is a Canadian success story.

However, the lack of legal protection meant that other countries could simply produce and sell them royalty-free. Mr. Andrews was talking about the Explorer roses.

• (1655)

It would have been great for the Agriculture Canada breeding program had these changes been in place back then, because farmers would have felt the benefit of having that protection and would have received revenue, which would have allowed them to continue to produce new and important varieties.

Canada's failure to meet the new UPOV standard affects more than the individual research teams and companies trying to develop the new varieties of plants. It also has a negative impact on Canada's innovation capacity and our economy.

Another stakeholder expressed this idea succinctly during her appearance before the House committee. Deborah Hart of the Potato Growers of Alberta had this to say:

...If UPOV 91 is ratified, it will allow our industry to compete with other international potato producing areas. It will encourage international breeders to introduce new varieties to Canada and allow our Canadian breeders, both public and private, the opportunity to use new genetic properties in their own breeding programs.

I have page after page of good quotes from people in the industry who have worked on this issue for a great deal of time. The final quote helps to further illustrate the benefits of meeting our UPOV standard. Here is another excerpt from the testimony of Chris Andrews of the Canadian Ornamental Horticulture Alliance:

...This sort of stuff also creates more investment by our growers and our breeders, which in turn creates more innovative plant material and helps us do research that will breed out disease in certain plants. I think that's very important because of all the openness with respect to trade around the world: we're a global economy now. There are more diseases, pests, and insects as well that come into the country, which we have to fight with respect to our new varieties.

Maybe this is why members of the New Democratic Party do not support this legislation. This legislation would truly allow trade to work more effectively and, as we all know, they simply do not support trade.

We listened to all of these witnesses at committee and after much productive discussion with other parties brought forward a further amendment regarding plant breeders' rights, making this legislation clearly and strongly confirm in explicit language that a farmer can store seed for planting in future years on his or her own farm. I hope members of the New Democratic Party heard that. It clearly states that; this legislation guarantees it. The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of meeting the new UPOV standard, and the proposed legislation now before us would take the necessary

steps to meet this goal while at the same time protecting a farmer's right to grow and keep his own seed if he or she wants.

The agricultural growth act proposes to bring protection of plant breeders' rights in Canada in line with those of our international partners and competitors. As a result, Canada's plant breeding industry would benefit from a more stable and modern intellectual property network.

These proposed changes would encourage increased investment in plant breeding in Canada. They would also encourage foreign breeders to protect and sell their varieties here.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the country's largest farm organization, has said:

...Canadian farmers will benefit greatly from increased innovation and an increase in new crop varieties as a result of these changes.

As well, a group of leading Canadian farm and agriculture organizations joined forces to support Bill C-18. By the way, any of us who deal with farmers quite a bit know that one thing that is very difficult to do is to get farm groups to work together to move something along, and yet that is what they have done with this. They see the importance to our industries of what is in this legislation.

Partners in Innovation includes the Canadian Horticultural Council, Grain Growers of Canada, and a number of commodity groups, including for potatoes, barley, and pulses. This group says that strengthening plant breeders' rights in Canada "...is critical for the future of our farmers and our agricultural industry's ability to compete in the global market."

At the same time, we will continue to consult with the industry before any changes are implemented, including regulatory changes. Our government continues to be committed to consultation to determine the best way to move forward.

• (1700)

I think that is important, and, quite frankly, it is one of the many things the two opposition parties have been calling for. It is reasonable and certainly something our government will continue to do. That said, I trust I can count on both sides of the House to move this necessary legislation forward.

The agricultural growth act proposes to modernize Canadian regulations on a foundation of science and technology, innovation, and international standards. I encourage my hon. colleagues opposite to join me in supporting Bill C-18.

Government Orders

As a farmer, for a number of years I have been following changes that I was hoping would happen a long time back. We all know that no matter what industry we are in—whether it is agriculture, any sector of our manufacturing industries, oil and gas production, mining, or whatever it is—what is going to allow Canada to remain competitive or become competitive is innovation. It is the new ideas spawned by Canadian industries that will keep us ahead of the pack. Quite frankly, in a lot of areas, Canadian industry is simply not competitive right now. We need exactly what this act would do for agriculture to help keep our industry competitive and ahead of the pack.

Farmers are doing their part. We all know the changes they have made so quickly. I would argue that farmers have become some of the most sophisticated managers in this country. The way they manage their businesses is remarkable. The way they adapt innovation is remarkable. The innovation they spawn in terms of new equipment and that kind of thing, often just in a shop somewhere on a farm in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, or elsewhere, is amazing. Farmers are doing their part.

Farmers have increased production on their farms remarkably. It was probably only 20 years ago that an average yield of canola was 25 or 26 bushels to the acre. Now, very commonly, canola yields are 40, 50, 60, or even 70 bushels to the acre. Certainly innovation and new varieties being developed in Canada in the case of canola have made a huge difference in this country for farmers. I know that I have seen the benefits of these developments, but there is much more to be done. The act before us would allow those developments to continue, and in commodities other than canola as well.

This act would truly help farmers keep ahead of the curve. It would help farmers with the innovation it would spawn to truly remain world leaders and continue the growth in production and marketing.

Canadian farmers have demonstrated clearly that they can compete with anybody in the world. In fact, in many cases even individual farmers and in other cases groups of farmers are trading with countries around the world. Our commodities are sought after because, quite frankly, they are better than most others in the world.

• (1705)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I was in Kagawong this weekend at a craft show and had a couple of farmers approach me on some of the agricultural issues that are of great concern to them.

We have tabled petition after petition on GMO in this House. Certainly when it comes seeds, it is an issue that is very near and dear to many hearts. We had hoped that this bill would actually have a balanced approach, because that is what is essential when it comes to plant breeders.

The member talked about the right of farmers to be able to save their seeds. Our concern is that these should be farmers' rights, not privileges, but this is what the government has done. It has actually put it into the bill as privileges.

During his speech, the member quoted some people. I can quote Dominique Bernier of AmiEs de la Terre de Québec:

...this bill considerably weakens farmers' ancestral rights by forcing them to pay compensation to agro-industrial giants on the entirety of their harvest. However, the marketing of new crop varieties by the big breeders rests on a world heritage, the patient selection, over thousands of years, of crops by succeeding generations of farmers.

There are several other statements that support the NDP position on the amendments that we had put forward.

One thing in particular I would like my colleague to explain is the changes to the section that refers to the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act. We saw this in the House. In particular, we would like to know why there were there further changes made regarding clause 136, because these changes were not discussed at committee. The witnesses did not have an opportunity to give feedback. Why would the government make changes in areas it had not even heard feedback on?

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to pooh-pooh the member's comments on what some farmers are telling her because, quite frankly, I too heard comments from some farmers in my area expressing concern about what was in this bill. Of course, once their commodity groups examined what was being put forward, they changed their minds.

I think we have to be open. I would encourage the members opposite to be open to looking at what is actually in the bill as opposed to what some people say is in this piece of legislation when it is not reality.

When making changes like this, it is really important that the changes be based on science, not just on rumours that are going around. As I said, I heard from some farmers. In fact, I tabled a couple of petitions in the House that probably had 100 or 150 names. Most were not farmers, but some were. They expressed concerns, and because they were constituents who had given me a petition to table, I tabled the petition.

The reality is that the more the commodity groups and the individual farmers actually looked at what we have done, the more they supported it. When the bill is implemented and the regulations are being put in place, I encourage all the members opposite, and the farmers they have talked to, to have input into the regulations. That is always an important part of legislation.

• (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to UPOV '91. UPOV '91 has generated some considerable concern over the impact it might have on third world countries.

My question is for the member. In his last response, he seemed to be sensitive to some of those concerns, and I am wondering if the member might want to expand on what he believes are some of the concerns in regard to UPOV '91.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that on examining what is in this legislation and on looking at UPOV '91, I see that the reality is that these changes will help farmers.

Government Orders

The premise of the member's question is not entirely accurate. I do believe that once examined, this legislation and its regulations will be seen to be good for farmers. I can assure the member of that.

I am sorry, but I forget the second question, so I will leave my answer at that.

[*Translation*]

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

Agriculture is the reason we live in society. If nobody grows food, we will have serious problems and will cease to exist as a species.

I am from an urban riding, so I am less familiar with certain aspects of agriculture. However, I am very familiar with public administration. Part of the bill is about work to be done at the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Given the government's habit of cutting the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food's resources, and given that this bill gives the department more work, will my colleague opposite ask the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the President of the Treasury Board to give the department more resources so that it can achieve the objectives set out in the bill before us?

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, this demonstrates the difference between Conservatives and members of the New Democratic Party.

We do not think it is just the number of public servants that determines how much work can get done. We think that is determined by the system they are operating in, a system that actually gives rewards for good work. We think that type of system allows more work to be done by the same number of people, and we have proved it, by the way, in many of the changes we have made in the public service, so I do not agree with the premise of the member's question or comment. I do think that with a better system in place, we can get an awful lot done with the same number of people.

However, the earlier question from the Liberal member opposite that I forgot to answer was to do with farmers in third world countries. I think this aspect is very important, because the reality is that the type of innovation spawned with this new UPOV '91 enactment is exactly what will allow Canada to continue to feed the world.

We have seen the amazing benefits of genetically modified food in feeding 200 million people in the world every year who would otherwise starve. I would suggest that the changes that this legislation would bring about would allow that number to increase from 200 million people being fed instead of starving.

It is a really good-news story and I simply do not see the potential negative impact that the member has referred to.

• (1715)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has done an impressive job in laying out the need to have the bill passed.

I have been listening to some of our colleagues from the NDP, who have basically been saying that the farmers do not have the privilege of using the seed once they purchase it.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on how farmers would be able to save and reuse that seed.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, because in my understanding, the reality is that until now, there has been no guarantee that farmers can save and reuse their seed. For the first time we will have the guarantee in legislation that farmers can do exactly that. I see a really good-news story when it comes to that issue.

I encourage the opposition members to talk about the good news in that story and about the reality, instead of just what someone might have indicated could be the case. That is what the case actually is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

What I see in Bill C-18 is that the minister is being given a great deal of discretion. This means that regardless of the laws that govern agriculture in Canada, if a friend of the minister manages to bend his ear, the minister will circumvent the law. If we have paid all our dues and done everything right but someone influences the minister, anyone of us can be told that we cannot even harvest our crops—even if we have bought the seeds and planted them.

The minister has been given far too much power. We live in a democratic system and we have a legal system complete with courts. Normally, it is up to the courts, not just one minister, to determine whether a right is given or taken away from someone.

Something else is bothering me. We are talking about breeders' rights, but it should be farmers' rights. Since time immemorial, everyone has had the right to collect a seed, plant it and harvest the fruits. Now we are being told that it is not a right, but a privilege. We are now living in a society where rights are being taken away from everyone and we are told that they are privileges. I agree that a driver's licence is a privilege, but many other things are natural rights: to grow things or to be able to walk and talk, for example. In the legal texts, we should change the word "privilege" to "right". As for the minister, he should be granted "privileges" and not "rights". That is how the bill should read.

There is one more thing that is of great concern to me. Last week, I spoke for 10 minutes about malicious prosecution. This bill will likely result in this type of problem. I will give an example. In my region, there is an organic farmer who uses only organic seeds. He raises his animals organically. Nevertheless, his neighbour grows GMOs. Everyone knows that grain is wind-pollinated. Vegetables are pollinated by insects. We cannot control the wind or insects. There are no borders between fields. Just by chance, it was noticed that there were genetically-modified vegetables among those harvested and replanted. That was a disaster for the organic farmer. Not only did the company that owned the GMO in question not want to reimburse the organic farmer, even though it is the one that contaminated his fields with its GMOs, but it is going to require the organic farmer to pay royalties.

Government Orders

● (1720)

That is what we call abusive litigation. I believe that under the law, those who want to farm in their own way must also be able to harvest, reuse and stock according to their type of crop. There are small corners of the country where grain is grown and the same grain always comes back. These are regional varieties.

Then along comes some company that wants to trample on these regional farmers and impose its own varieties. It sows the new variety in a field among 10 other fields where heirloom varieties grow. There is contamination. It has happened before and it will happen again. The company that did the contamination sues everyone and wants royalties from all the land around it, claiming that the farmer spread pollen all around. A lot of this abusive litigation goes on. I talked about Kokopelli before. It is the target of abusive litigation by French breeders. In France, UPOV '91 was adopted a long time ago, and major multinationals are taking advantage of that.

There is another thing that concerns me about this bill, and that is cascading royalties. When I buy a car, I pay the fees, the taxes and so forth and then I use it. Let us say that after 50,000 kilometres, the company comes along and tells me that if I want to keep using the car, I will have to pay for it all over again. My vehicle works just fine. They are surprised and they charge royalties. The same thing happens at 75,000 kilometres and 100,000 kilometres. That too is an example of cascading royalties. A farmer buys a top-quality product and grows it conscientiously on his land. He puts time, money and everything necessary into it, regardless the method he uses, and he gets a good yield. Then, because he has a better yield than the third farmer who planted the same product, he is charged an additional royalty. As it turns out, because of weather problems elsewhere that summer, his product is worth more money. He is charged another royalty. I call that cascading abusive royalties. Then, if people fight to get his product because it is so great, he will be charged more royalties. Those are cascading abusive royalties.

Can Bill C-18 protect him from that or can the minister, with all the privileges he is being granted, protect the farmer? What I see in this bill, as with almost all of the Conservative government's bills, is that it protects big corporations and leaves small businesses to fend for themselves.

It is also important to protect access to heirloom, heritage and public varieties. It is important that we continue to have access to seeds that have proven their worth for hundreds of years.

● (1725)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave an excellent speech from the heart, as usual. He must certainly be aware that Quebec accounts for 22% of Canada's agri-food GDP.

I am pointing this out, because Quebecers are often told that they do not have much agriculture in their province, even though they do, and quite a bit. Corn ranks first at \$696 million, followed by soy, vegetables and maple products, which you would have thought would be first, most probably because of good advertising. If you add that to animal products, the total is over \$8 billion.

The member mentioned how important it was to give farmers the freedom to use and produce what they want, without having a pre-established structure in which, for example, they would be forced to buy grains that were produced elsewhere and that would destroy their own grains.

I think this freedom to produce and to be a small producer, is important for the member, is that correct?

Mr. Réjean Genest: Mr. Speaker, it is extremely important. It is a matter of protecting a farmer's right to choose what they will grow based on their experience.

The worst thing that was done to agriculture in recent years was the Canadian Wheat Board. Farmers do not have the right to join a group of farmers to sell a product. That is outrageous. The right of association exists for all kinds of things, but not for that.

Once again, farmers are being denied a right.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member heard from his constituents, as I did from mine, concerns expressed regarding UPOV '91. The government attempted to deal with those concerns at the committee stage and brought forward an amendment. I will say that in good part, they have been dealt with.

I wonder if the member can indicate whether his party still has any concerns in regard to that specific area, or does he believe the government was able to adequately address them?

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Genest: Mr. Speaker, if one farming association is opposed to UPOV '91 and another association supports it, it is because the Conservative government, as usual, is introducing an omnibus bill that amends a series of laws. Some parts are acceptable to certain groups but not to others.

Honestly, it is difficult to decide without looking at it on a case-by-case basis. This bill should be divided into 9 or 10 parts, each leading to its own law. It is tough to take a stance because this is yet another omnibus agricultural bill.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-18. The official opposition supported it at second reading but will be opposing it at third reading. I will explain why in the next few minutes.

Bill C-18 amends certain agricultural and agri-food laws. Bill C-18, so that people understand, is part of a top-priority, major debate for the ones who will follow, to paraphrase a film titled *For Those Who Will Follow*, which is well known in my region. This is a debate about patenting life forms. It is a great thing when it is done well. Patents can acknowledge the efforts put into research and the associated costs. They can provide a return on investment for people who have invested in research. That is as true for agriculture as it is for other industries. Patents can make the corresponding knowledge available to everyone.

Government Orders

The advantage of a patent—if it is done properly, if it is not sold for a fortune and if a fake patent is not invented with fake benefits—is that once someone has invested in that knowledge, in the results, and the patent is made public, a great number of people can benefit from it.

However, because we are talking about things we can eat, the very stuff of life, companies that already have many patents on gene sequences, microorganisms and GMOs should not be allowed to patent the genes of varieties developed by groups of farmers over decades. In some cases, we are talking about species that took hundreds or even thousands of years to develop. We absolutely have to protect that while acknowledging that, in some cases, patenting can be a good thing to do if it is done properly and regulated properly.

Probably the most disturbing case, which happened not long ago in Canada and has a bearing on this discussion about patenting living things, involved a farmer called Mr. Schmeiser. Monsanto took him to court for violating a patent. The company discovered that some Roundup Ready was growing in one of Mr. Schmeiser's canola fields even though he swore he had not planted any. A trial court judge sided with Monsanto in the case even though nobody was able to prove how the contamination happened or why Monsanto's products ended up in the farmer's field. Mr. Schmeiser even proved that he had never used Roundup. If Monsanto seeds grew in his field, he did not benefit from it. You have to know how Monsanto products work to take advantage of them because you have to apply Roundup to kill everything else so you can reap the benefits. The farmer proved that he never reaped that benefit. He probably never intended to benefit from the seeds and violate Monsanto's rights, but he was convicted as though he had committed a crime.

The NDP therefore believes that a balanced approach is essential when it comes to the protection of plant breeders' rights—consider Mr. Schmeiser. Bill C-18 does not meet that objective. As a result, the NDP will oppose this bill at third reading.

In the comments that follow, you will hear the word “breeder”. I want to make sure that those who are kind enough to watch us on CPAC understand what a breeder is. A breeder is the organization that produced, by voluntary selection or genetic manipulation, a plant that is sufficiently stable, homogeneous and distinct from other varieties of the same species to be considered a new variety. If an organization can demonstrate that it succeeded in obtaining such a variety by genetic manipulation or crossbreeding, in many cases, then it should be given the rights associated with the years of research and investments.

As I was saying at the beginning of my speech, we tried to support the bill at second reading in the hopes that the governing party would act in good faith and allow us to amend aspects of the bill that we and many associations are very concerned about. The NDP proposed 16 amendments so that the rules would be fairer for both the breeders, who have the rights to these new varieties, and farmers.

• (1735)

All of our amendments, without exception, were rejected by the Conservative members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. No improvements were made, even though the

witnesses essentially agreed with the NDP that the bill needed to be improved.

Here is one example. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture is calling for protections for producers from claims of patent infringement with respect to natural or accidental spreading of patented plant genetic material. This is very similar to the case of Mr. Schmeiser. The NDP therefore proposed an amendment that would have required the intent to infringe on patent protection to be proven, which would have made it possible to distinguish between deliberate patent infringement and the accidental spreading of a patented plant genetic material.

This amendment was rejected, even though it was based on the testimony of witnesses and on the case of a Canadian farmer who had a very difficult time for reasons that, in my opinion, did not make sense. Unfortunately, we will have to vote against the bill at third reading, despite the goodwill of my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Worse still, in a similar vein, there are no provisions in Bill C-18 to ensure that legal fees do not impede farmers' defence in such cases. Imagine if a large biotechnology company were to accidentally spread some seeds. In my region, there was a huge issue with spinach that was possibly genetically modified. Some producers of non-GMO spinach in the region wonder what they will do if such an accident does happen and how they can prove it and defend themselves against the company.

It there is any bad faith on the part of a big multinational like Monsanto, for example, how is a small producer supposed to defend himself if, from the outset, the law does not provide sufficient defence? He could go to court and try to defend himself by saying that he did not deliberately contaminate his field with a patented plant from his neighbour's field, but how much would that cost him? He would not be able to prove that in court if there is no regulatory framework to provide him with minimal protections, which is what we wanted. This could drag on in court forever, and small producers are certainly not going to be the ones to come out ahead in a process like that.

The amendment was proposed, but it was not included in the bill. Like many other amendments, it was rejected by the Conservative majority. Furthermore, the NDP is concerned about the powers being granted to the minister, including the power in the regulations to unconditionally exempt rights and privileges, not of those who obtain the patent, but once again of farmers, on a case by case basis. To sum up why the NDP does not support Bill C-18 at third reading, the bill does not explicitly protect farmers and it puts too much discretionary power in the minister's hands. We oppose this bill.

The bill includes some things that not everyone agrees on, but at least they make sense. However, it also includes many new exclusive rights for plant breeders: reproduction, conditioning, sale, export or import, and stocking for the purpose of exercising other exclusive rights. This is all meant to give rights to plant breeders.

Government Orders

What is more, it also gives farmers what it calls “privileges” and not rights. It is odd to think that after Bill C-18, someone who is growing a natural variety, developed over hundreds of years literally by his ancestors, will no longer really have the right to grow that variety. However, there would be some sort of tolerance or privilege to allow him to do so. In our opinion, this should be called a right. Ethically, this should even be a right that would trump the rights of patent-holding growers who aggressively come after those people who farm our centuries-old heritage products.

In closing, I want to address other amendments suggested by the NDP that were rejected as well. For example, we wanted to protect farmers from abusive litigation. Other members have talked about that. We wanted to ensure that farmers are consulted on the implementation of the bill and the subsequent changes to the rules and regulations.

• (1740)

Since this could have a serious impact on the industry, we wanted to ensure that Bill C-18 would be reviewed regularly and that people in the agricultural sector would always be included in those reviews. This too was rejected. We wanted to prohibit the cascade of royalties, as my colleagues were saying, to ensure that contracts would prevent harmful royalties from being added at every processing stage. This is not settled either.

Finally, I want people to understand that we are against this bill at third reading because it was impossible to improve a bill that should have been improved out of respect for our Canadian farmers.

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): I was listening to my colleague's eloquent speech and thinking to myself that he lives in a beautiful riding whose name I can never get quite right because it covers so much territory. It is the beautiful region of the Lower St. Lawrence, which is where I am from. I definitely have a soft spot for that area.

I know that a lot of farmers in this region are concerned because they want to be sure that their rights and privileges are upheld and we recognize how important they are to this country. Our agriculture is a huge source of pride. When I see it or the topic of financial assistance called into question on occasion, I get worried. I know that this will affect farmers back home.

My colleague made a number of points, so I want to ask him to talk about other elements that affect his riding in particular. How would this bill affect his constituents?

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I cannot find it in my notes, but there was a whole section on the flexibility of advance payments. Back home, people have mixed feelings about advance payments. Some farmers are experiencing financial difficulties. When the time came to negotiate the remaining payments on this program with the federal government, things did not go well.

One of the first things I want to do, now that we know that Bill C-18 will unfortunately pass as is, without amendment, is to go back to these people to see whether this flexibility could actually have helped them, in the context of what happened to them five, six, seven or eight years ago.

This measure could perhaps be made retroactive to make it clear that these people need flexibility to resolve their financial issues.

These are proud farmers who have worked hard, and they had no control over the events that led them to the brink of bankruptcy.

I will then make sure that this flexibility will be considered for these people as well. We cannot lose our farmers in the regions.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech. We could add the lack of democracy, the protection of heirloom grains and the refusal of NDP amendments to his long list.

Furthermore, I would like the member to talk about the fact that Canada is a signatory to UPOV 1991, which has never been ratified by the government.

Why not and what is it waiting for?

• (1745)

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, UPOV 1991 is part of what I was discussing at the beginning, namely the fact that we are giving great consideration to the protection of plant material and the balance between protecting patents and this legacy.

Will we sign these agreements because of Bill C-18? It is not clear to me or to our critics who have worked very hard on this file.

Furthermore, Bill C-18 is vague with respect to long-term intentions. This could be part of the long list of things about the bill that we must unfortunately criticize. Once again we were unable to amend it despite the goodwill of the witnesses and the official opposition.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is one question that I have asked several of my colleagues recently with respect to various bills.

What does he think of this growing trend of giving more and more powers to ministers in all kinds of bills?

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-18 is in keeping with that trend. Here again, there are many areas where the government is saying it will legislate with Bill C-18. There are the so-called plant breeders' rights and farmers' “privileges”.

There are many imperfections in the bill, but topping it all off is the right to amend the impact of the legislation through regulations and authorities that are as dumb as any minister who would get directly involved. That is a serious problem.

There is a pile of bungled omnibus bills that have not taken expert opinions into consideration. They affect a lot of different aspects of a sector and include the possibility of, for example, regulating other things if the bills do not work. This is an appalling admission that these bills have not fully matured. If that were the case, the government would not have to say that it will do something else if the bill does not work two weeks down the road. That is very worrisome.

[English]

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Brandon—Souris.

Government Orders

This government has made no bones about it. Creating jobs and strengthening Canada's economy remains our top priority. Through Bill C-18, we would secure the continued success of one of Canada's prominent industries, agriculture.

In 2009, Canada exported \$35 billion in agriculture and agri-food products. Last year, we exported \$50.4 billion, and the potential for future growth is substantial.

With the global population expected to reach 9.3 billion by the year 2050, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that in order to feed everyone internationally, food production will need to increase by 60%.

Currently, the world is hungry for the goods that Canadian agriculture producers provide. Bill C-18, the agriculture growth act, would ensure our farmers would have the means to meet that demand. More specific, the act would ensure that Canadian farmers could keep pace and even make gains against competitors like China, Brazil, Russia, Australia, the United States and the European Union.

One way in which Bill C-18 would give Canadian farmers an edge is through the proposed amendment to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act, and I will explain.

Canadian agriculture producers cultivate more than 75 million acres of farmland from coast to coast. Ultimately, the value of the harvest depends largely on the quality of the seed sown. To grow the best, Canadian farmers must plant the best. They must sow crop varieties that produce high yields, resist drought and disease, and that meet specific demands in the global market.

This sounds straightforward, but the science behind the development of farmers' all-important seeds is extremely complex.

Plant breeding is a time and resource-intensive process. It typically takes 10 to 12 years to bring a new variety to market. As members can do doubt appreciate, plant breeders have a reasonable desire to own the results of their many years of hard work.

Where inventors protect their intellectual property through patents, plant breeders do the same through plant breeders' rights. These rights give plant breeders control over the sale of the seeds, cuttings and other reproductive material of the new plant varieties they create.

In Canada, all plant species are eligible for protection. The relative strength of our intellectual property environment for the plant breeding industry, however, ends there.

Nearly all of our major international partners, including the United States, the EU, Japan, Australia and even South Korea have an enticing environment that conforms with most current international standards: the 1991 International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. Canada's existing plant breeders' rights meanwhile is based on outdated 1978 conventions. We cannot afford to continue to lag behind.

Ms. Patty Townsend, the chief executive officer of the Canadian Seed Trade Association, an association that brings together 130 seed company members, has said:

Due to our outdated plant breeders' rights legislation, companies with an interest in these crops have chosen to invest elsewhere. Added to that is the fact that plant breeders outside of our borders won't send their varieties here for testing, because our plant breeders' rights legislation has not kept pace with the rest of the world.

We can change this and update the protection. We will encourage private investment in Canadian plant breeding programs, encourage more foreign breeders to protect and sell their varieties here in Canada, and ensure that Canadian agriculture and horticulture producers gain access to the innovative new plant varieties they need to compete in a global marketplace.

Specifically, Bill C-18's proposed changes to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act would improve protection for plant breeders in five ways.

First, the amendments would extend plant breeders' rights to the reproduction, import and export, conditioning and stocking of material for commercial purposes or propagating. Currently, the plant breeders are protected only on the sale of propagating material and for production and propagating material intended for sale.

Second, the amendments would enable plant breeders to sell the new varieties in Canada for up to one year before they must apply for plant breeders' rights protection. For many breeders, this 12-month period would be critical because it would allow them the time to test the market, advertise and increase their seed stock before they filed for protection.

Third, Bill C-18 would entitle plant breeders to exercise their rights while applications were pending by providing provisional protections for a new plant variety from the date the application is filed.

Fourth, Bill C-18 would lengthen the time plant breeders would be protected from 18 years to 25 years for trees, vines and other specified categories, and from 18 to 20 years for all other crops. In both cases, breeders could choose to terminate their rights earlier.

• (1750)

Finally, Bill C-18 would clarify under the act that plant breeders could only collect royalties on the initial sale of a particular cycle of propagating material. Should breeders be denied reasonable opportunities to collect these royalties because of theft or the illicit sharing of propagating materials, they could exercise rights on harvested material.

These are five critical improvements. They are five critical tools that agriculture innovators need to protect their investments and successfully conduct business in today's global marketplace.

Our Conservative government heard from stakeholders that there was a need to amend Bill C-18 to make it absolutely clear that storage of seed is included in farmers' privilege. As a result, we now have an amendment that directly addresses this key issue.

Government Orders

Equally important is that Bill C-18 would balance the interests of agricultural producers and breeders and would ensure benefit-sharing through two specific exemptions.

First, under the research exemption, anyone would be able to study or conduct experiments on protected varieties without seeking permission. This means that Canadian farmers, whose livelihoods are tied to their seeds and soil, would continue to get up-to-date information on potential benefits and drawbacks of those seeds years after the release of a new variety.

Through the second exemption, the breeders' exemption, anyone could access protected varieties to breed other new varieties without seeking permission. What this means is that profits would not stand in the way of innovation and progress. Competing plant breeders would have open access to all PBR protected varieties for breeding purposes so that they could build and improve upon the work of others. By extension, every Canadian farmer would be able to benefit from a competitive breeding environment, which would bring new and innovative plant varieties to the marketplace to meet their specific needs.

I do, however, support the amendments as they stand in the agricultural growth act, and I do not use that title lightly. This act would improve the quality of agricultural inputs and would increase the global demand for Canada's agriculture goods. I ask Parliament to join me in supporting Bill C-18.

I have gone back to my riding and have talked about Bill C-18. There has been a lot of confusion and a lot of misinformation spread by different parties that does not really benefit the industry. However, when I have sat down with farmers and have told them the exact benefits and gains they would be getting from plant breeders' rights and what benefits they would see in the future, they have been very excited. They understand what can happen when they invest in new seed technologies.

I look at the canola industry back to Saskatchewan. When I was farming back in the early 2000s, if people had a 20 or 25 bushel crop, that was an average crop. If people had a 35 or 40 bushel crop, that was a tremendous crop. If people had a 50 or 60 bushel crop, they were just fibbing or lying. Today, the reality is that 50 or 60 bushels is quite common, 40 bushels is okay, and 20 or 25 bushels is a disaster. The changes that have happened are because of plant breeding. It is because we have invested in new genetics. Those new genetics have been marketed to farmers, and they have been able to take advantage of it.

The return per acre for the farmer in this situation has been phenomenal. When we look at a 20 or 25 bushel crop going to a 60 or 65 bushel crop, their return per acre is more than doubling. When we look at the operations farmers have, their incomes are definitely going up substantially. That is why the farmers get very excited.

If we can take that technology and logic and put it into wheat, barley, pulses, and lentils in our agriculture sector, we can see the benefits to farmers. That is why they get really excited about the potential of seeing this type of investment here in Canada. In fact, we are already seeing companies investing here in Canada. We are already seeing Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada taking advantage of new varieties. The collaboration and the growth from new

companies and the work Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has done is very exciting for farmers. It is going to make a very exciting and very strong future for Canadian farmers, especially young farmers.

I will close there. This is such a basic act. It has been modernizing our agriculture sector. It is something it requires and has asked for, and we are just doing what it wants. The benefit at the end of the day will be for all Canadians, because when Canadian farmers grow and harvest a good crop, they spend money, and the Canadian economy flourishes.

● (1755)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, I rise in the House on this particular bill to reiterate the fact that we need a balanced approach. We do not quite see that in this bill.

We put forward 16 amendments, which the government denied outright. Here is an opportunity for the government to say that opposition members have farmers in their ridings as well. A variety of people have presented here, and the government should be taking everyone's views and making sure that it has a bill it will not be challenged on over and over again, as we have seen with previous bills.

The fact is that we need to ensure that every farmer's rights are looked after. I wonder if the member can explain why the NDP amendments were defeated, especially the one that would have ensured that new varieties were as good as or better than existing ones. The NDP amendment would have included language that would ensure that new varieties demonstrate unique features that are clearly distinguishable from the initial varieties.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the amendments proposed by the NDP were bad amendments. It does not matter how many amendments one proposes in committee, if they are bad amendments, they are bad amendments.

If the member had been there and listened to the witnesses, she would have heard what farmers and the industry were saying. The New Democrats would have recognized the fact that they should not even have come forward with those types of amendments.

The member should not complain because her amendments were not approved. If she writes bad amendments, they will not be approved by this government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not feel obligated to defend the New Democratic amendments, but if we look at the government's record on amendments, no one would be surprised to know that it is very rare for amendments to be approved. It might have approved one or two since it formed a majority government.

I want to focus on the bill. We in the Liberal Party understand and appreciate many of the needs our farmers have and why it is important that we take a step forward. This legislation deals with a number of acts. It is not just one focus, even though the member across the way focused on one aspect of the legislation.

There is no doubt that we need to recognize the valuable economic and social impact our farming community, our agriculture sector, plays in our economy. We want it to grow.

Government Orders

The question I have for the member is not that far off from the previous question. Does the member not recognize that, yes, this as a whole is good legislation, but it could have been that much better for our farmers had the government listened to what the stakeholders, in particular our farmers, across the country had to say, which could have improved upon the legislation?

Would the member comment on why the government not only rejected the NDP amendments but also Liberal amendments and some good ideas that came from the stakeholders?

• (1800)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, we are not biased on this side of the floor. A bad amendment from the Liberals or a bad amendment from the NDP is a bad amendment. It does not matter where it comes from. If it is a bad amendment, it is a bad amendment and should be voted down, which was done.

He does not understand that a tremendous amount of consultation went into this legislation before it ever hit committee. We talked to stakeholders and there was a consulting process with the Department of Agriculture, which the minister went through. It was intensive. As a result, we have a bill that is exactly what the stakeholders, the industry and the farmers wanted, and that is what they got.

For johnny-come-latelies to say they can make an amendment and look like heroes, they have been non-existent in the agriculture scene all along. They are still non-existent in the agriculture scene. Putting forward more and more bad amendments will not improve their stature among agriculture producers.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to have the opportunity to explain why I support Bill C-18.

The agricultural growth act proposes to modernize the legislative framework that supports Canada's agricultural and agri-food industry. This framework helps to protect the safety of the food we eat and helps our farmers and producers compete successfully in global markets. The bill proposes a series of amendments that would modernize and streamline nine different statutes, seven that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency uses to regulate Canada's agricultural sector, and two administered by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Some of the acts that Bill C-18 would amend date back to the 1950s. They have served us well, to be sure, but we are in 2014 now. In recent decades, the agricultural and agri-food industry has experienced tremendous innovation, such as new production techniques, and plant varieties that are driven by science. During the same period, international trade in agricultural products has skyrocketed. Today, Canadians regularly eat foods originating from around the world, and Canadian food products are exported to an ever-expanding list of foreign markets.

Given these significant changes, it comes as no surprise to learn that Canada's current legislative framework for agriculture, first enacted decades ago, is outdated and struggles to accommodate modern realities. As new varieties and new developments in science continue to emerge, this framework must evolve to keep pace. This is particularly true when our international trading partners regularly modernize their legislative frameworks. The agricultural growth act

proposes to put Canada's legislative framework on par with those of other countries.

Bill C-18 would help support the ability of Canada's farmers and producers to compete in global markets. To illustrate, allow me to focus on a few specific challenges and explain how the agricultural growth act proposes to meet them.

The first challenge relates to plant breeders' rights and how they are protected. Agricultural researchers continually strive to develop new varieties of plants, varieties that produce greater yields or are more resistant to drought, pests, or disease. This innovation is essential to modern agriculture. Without research, there is no progress.

To support ongoing innovation, most countries abide by an international convention on plant breeders' rights, known as UPOV, the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. The convention sets a legal standard for protecting these rights. Unfortunately, Canada's laws do not meet the current standard, known as UPOV '91. Bill C-18 would bring Canadian law up to the current UPOV standard. This would give Canadian farmers access to the same cutting-edge crop varieties that most of their foreign competitors already have.

Bringing our law up to the current UPOV standard would also promote crop research here in Canada. This is because any research breakthroughs made in Canada would be protected by laws in Canada, which would be on par with the laws adopted in other countries that have ratified UPOV '91. This kind of protection would give investors the confidence they need to back the development of new varieties and production techniques in Canada. As was just pointed out by my colleague, there are many benefits.

During its review of Bill C-18, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food heard several professionals make precisely this point. For example, consider the statement from Mr. Gary Stanford, president of the Grain Growers of Canada. He said:

The adoption of Bill C-18 will bring our regulations in line with international standards. Canada is only one of a handful of developed countries not covered under UPOV 91. This keeps our farmers out of competitive advantage. Aligning our regulations will not only level the playing field for our producers, but it will also encourage foreign investment into new varieties for Canada. This would give our farmers access to new varieties that their competitors already use.

It is important to recognize that Bill C-18 explicitly recognizes the farmers' traditional practice of saving and reusing seeds from crops grown on their own land. The practice is commonly known as farmers' privilege. Bill C-18 now includes an amendment that makes it perfectly clear that Canada's farmers will be able to continue saving, cleaning, treating, storing, and replanting seed from protected varieties on their own land.

Therefore, when it comes to new varieties, Bill C-18 balances the interests of all concerned, producers, researchers, and consumers.

• (1805)

The proposed legislation would encourage researchers to develop new varieties, at the same time enshrining and protecting the practice of farmers' privilege.

Government Orders

Bill C-18 also proposes to improve the legal framework governing Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector in other ways. The proposed legislation would, for instance, allow consideration of foreign reviews and analyses in the approval process. This change is designed to promote innovation and to cut red tape when it comes to approving certain agricultural products.

The standing committee heard from several industry representatives who strongly support this element of the bill.

Mr. R. Edward Empringham, senior project manager of the Canadian Animal Health Coalition, had this to say:

...as a matter of principle the coalition supports the modernization of legislation to harmonize approaches and recognize modern business practices, the concept of inclusion by reference into regulation, the ability to reference foreign reviews and analysis, and the need to ensure that legislation ensures the protection of animal health and welfare, food safety, meets the requirements of trade, enables innovation, and doesn't impede commerce.

Bill C-18 proposes to clarify and confirm the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's authority to consider foreign reviews, data, and analyses during the evaluation for approval or registration of agricultural products that are new to the Canadian market.

This information would be considered in addition to ongoing Canadian reviews and analyses, always with an eye to the Canadian context, such as how relevant that foreign data is to the Canadian environment.

This in turn would allow for an efficient and effective approval process so that Canada's farmers can benefit from the latest scientific research from around the world and keep pace with the competition.

Bill C-18 would also introduce, through future regulations, the ability to license and register feed and fertilizer manufacturers. The agricultural growth act proposes new, broader controls on the safety of Canada's agricultural inputs through licensing or registration of feed and fertilizer manufacturers.

The proposed amendment would align Canadian legislation with international trading partners and help our feed and fertilizer industries maintain their export markets, especially with the United States.

The approach proposed in Bill C-18 keeps farmers top of mind. This amendment should apply only to businesses that sell animal feed and fertilizer products across provincial and international borders. It would not apply to farmers who make these products for use on their own farms.

The wisdom of this balanced approach earned the approval of the producers and other professionals who appeared before the standing committee.

Here is an excerpt from the testimony of Mr. Clyde Graham, acting president of the Canadian Fertilizer Institute:

Bill C-18 allows for the licensing of fertilizer and supplement establishments, which is common in the United States. The bill also enables the licensing of persons to conduct an activity involving fertilizer and supplements. The Canadian Fertilizer Products Forum has signalled that this is an area that needs to be explored, but only with industry consultation.

Regulations form the core of all licensing regimes, and this government would develop regulations only through detailed consultations with stakeholders.

The truth of the matter is that the extensive shareholder consultations completed during the past few years fully informed the agricultural growth act. This government continues to listen, and, as the most recent amendments made to Bill C-18 attest, we take appropriate action.

We also remain committed to additional consultations. Please be assured that before any changes are implemented, especially regulatory changes, our government is committed to consultation to determine the best course of action.

Upon the bill's receiving royal assent—and it is my great desire to see that day—some of the changes would come into force almost immediately, while others would be phased in or require regulatory amendments.

We need royal assent. That is why I encourage all my colleagues to vote for this legislation.

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Over time, we have gotten used to feeling that this government does not listen to us. Earlier, one of our colleagues said that the amendments we proposed were most likely moronic as usual. Obviously, that kind of disdain for the opposition does not really bother us anymore.

Does my colleague believe that the bill was perfect by virtue of the fact that his apparently omniscient party created it, even though the UPA's brief did raise several issues?

How can it be that, once again, these issues did not cause Conservative Party representatives to feel even a twinge of doubt about whether it is a good idea to drive a bulldozer with blinkers on?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, as pointed out in my presentation, there were amendments that came forward. My colleagues did put some amendments forward in regard to ensuring that farmers could grow their own seed and use it on their own farming operations, not sell it in other commercial entities. That is a right of farmers, the farmers' privilege. That amendment did come forward, and it passed because it was a good amendment.

I want to say that there are many other opportunities to bring legislation like this forward, but this is a prime piece of legislation that would bring Canada up to speed, no matter where they are in Canada. No matter where they are in regard to being able to move more of the product, this legislation would bring us up to speed with the UPOV '91, on which we were falling behind in many areas.

Government Orders

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Brandon—Souris, not only for his great intervention and speech but also for his understanding, knowledge, and background in agriculture.

I have been listening to this debate, which will wrap up here shortly. The focus has been on farmers' privilege, and I understand why some folks are focusing on that aspect but missing the big picture of the greatest value and the greatest movement forward for the agriculture industry in many years.

One of the things I would like to ask my colleague is this. I had the privilege in 2006 of bringing forward a motion, M-460, to give the competitive edge in getting products to the farmers at a reasonable rate and having the inputs from research so that as global research is done, Canada can be a part of that. What it is about is ensuring that our products are competitive in the big field.

I want—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member has a very short answer.

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, it is just as I said earlier. This bill is so important in bringing us up to the rest of the world in terms of UPOV '91. We had fallen behind. We were still in the 1950s, and this is a great opportunity for us to move forward in the world and be able to be competitive with others. As I said earlier, if we do not have research, we do not have an industry. That is why it is so important to get caught up with the rest of the world in these areas.

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made Wednesday, November 19, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

• (1840)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 284)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Baird
Barlow	Bateman
Bennett	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Butt
Calandra	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Casey	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Crockatt
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dion
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Falk	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Foote
Freeland	Fry
Galipeau	Garneau
Gill	Goguen
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hoback	Hsu
James	Jones
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureux	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Murray	Nicholson
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Pacetti
Payne	Poillievre
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Seeback	Sgro
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
son)	
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton

Government Orders

Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Uppal	Valcourt
Valeriotte	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vaughan
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 166

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Boivin	Borg
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brousseau	Caron
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Freeman
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Hughes
Hyer	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
Mai	Marston
Masse	Mathysen
May	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Rafferty	Rankin
Ravignat	Rousseau
Saganash	Scott
Sellah	Sitsabaiesan
Stewart	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel — 76

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

TOUGHER PENALTIES FOR CHILD PREDATORS ACT

The House resumed from November 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Sex Offender Information Registration Act, to enact the High Risk Child Sex Offender Database Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-26.

● (1845)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 285)***YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anderson
Angus	Armstrong
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Baird	Barlow
Bateman	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brison	Brousseau
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt	Calandra
Cannan	Carmichael
Caron	Carrie
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Cleary	Clement
Comartin	Côté
Crockatt	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Daniel	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dechert	Devolin
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Doré Lefebvre
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Falk	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Foote
Freeland	Freeman
Fry	Galipeau
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Gill
Godin	Goguen
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hoback	Hsu
Hughes	James
Jones	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kellway	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lauzon
Laverdière	Lebel
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leslie	Leung
Liu	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski

Adjournment Proceedings

Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nicholson	Norlock
Nunez-Melo	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Pacetti
Papillon	Payne
Péclét	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Poilievre	Rafferty
Rajotte	Rankin
Ravignat	Regan
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Rousseau	Saganash
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Scott
Seeback	Sellah
Sgro	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sitsabaiesan	
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Stewart	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Turmel
Uppal	Valcourt
Valeriot	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vaughan
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 242

NAYS

Members

Hyer

May — 2

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1850)

[Translation]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time that I have risen as the deputy critic for consumer protection to discuss the importance of consumer protection.

On October 21, 2014, I asked the Conservatives this question: the government promised a year ago to put an end to pay-to-pay billing practices—the ridiculous \$2 or \$3 or even higher charges that telecommunications companies and banks sometimes add to invoices. In its throne speech a year ago, the government promised to put an end to this kind of excessive fees. Since October 2013, the Conservative government has done nothing. Consumers are tired of paying the abusive fees charged by banks and telecom companies. People are at the point where they sometimes have to pay just to get their bills.

Despite the Conservatives' promises, a number of companies continue to gouge consumers. When will the Conservatives finally do something tangible to support the NDP's proposals and make life more affordable for Canadians? Unfortunately, that is what I talked about the last time in the House. This did not really strike the Conservatives as important. It is unfortunate because Canadian taxpayers have to pay more and more for food, rent, electricity and things such as child care, and the Conservatives' measures are certainly not going to help taxpayers pay less.

When taxpayers are stretched thin like that, they hope that the government can at least make clear commitments to reduce the billions in profits the banks are making. We see that year after year. Regardless of the state of the country's economy, the banks are making bigger profits all the time. In the meantime, Canadian household debt is increasing. The rate of Canadian household debt is currently 168%, which is quite high.

That is why we must help give Canadian families some breathing room by cutting their costs and especially by eliminating the famous \$2 charge for a paper bill. It is really ridiculous to have to pay to get your own bill. It is actually a hidden tax. The NDP has been pressuring the government about this for a number of years. *La Facture* in Quebec did a program on it. We are asking the government to eliminate pay-to-pay fees and all other hidden fees, not just in telecommunications but also in the banking sector, in order to prevent consumers from being gouged because of this situation.

We know that Canadians pay between \$495 million and \$734 million every year to receive paper copies of their telecom bills and their bank statements. That is shameful. We absolutely have to fix this.

As a result of the hard work we do here, the NDP thinks that consumers will soon have access to new regulations that would eliminate these fees. There was a semi-compromise in the regulations in the Conservatives' last bill. The regulations eliminate the \$2 charge on some bills, but not on others. We do not think that was right. The government should really go all the way.

Adjournment Proceedings

Now is the time to ask the Conservatives what they think about this and whether they think it would be a good idea to finish the job so that all families can have a little breathing room with all of their bills.

[English]

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to the comments made earlier by the hon. member for Québec regarding our government's commitment to end pay-to-pay policies.

Let me begin by saying that this government understands that Canadian families work hard for their money and expect their government to work hard for them too, and it does.

In the 2013 Speech from the Throne, our government promised to end pay-to-pay policies so that consumers would not have to pay extra to receive their bills in paper form. It reinforced this promise in budget 2014. On October 23, 2014 our government tabled legislation to end these unfair billing practices in the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. We could not be clearer. The legislation states that providers in these sectors shall not charge their subscribers for paper bills.

A report by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, released in August 2014, found the cost of paper bills for Canadians to be between \$495 million and \$734 million annually. Canadians were clear that they found these additional charges to simply pay their bills unacceptable, and we have responded, putting the interests of Canadian consumers first.

We gave the industry the opportunity to eliminate these fees voluntarily, but it did not. Following the commitment in the Speech from the Throne and in budget 2014, we noted that our government would be following the proceedings on paper billing fees that were being undertaken by Canada's telecommunications regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. In late August 2014, the CRTC met with the industry to try to come to a voluntary industry-led solution to the problem of unfair fees for paper bills, but the industry could not agree to stop these charges, so we acted swiftly to table our legislation.

The legislation includes new enforcement mechanisms for the CRTC to promote compliance with the Telecommunications Act, including prohibiting telecommunications service providers from charging for paper bills and ensuring that those in violation face appropriate monetary penalties of up to \$10 million for a first violation and up to \$15 million for subsequent violations.

Canadians have made it clear that they expect lower prices and better service from their telecommunications providers. When consumers make decisions about how to spend their money, they deserve transparency and choice in a free marketplace.

Our government has taken action to achieve greater competition in the telecommunications sector, and Canadian families have seen lower prices and more choice. As a government, we will continue to stand up for consumer choice and competition and to promote policies that support hard-working Canadian consumers.

● (1855)

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, if I understood the member opposite correctly, when it comes to protecting consumers, unfortunately, the government is once again satisfied with half measures.

The government chose not to impose its new regulations on banks. Of course, it cannot touch the banks. That is for sure. That means that Canadian banks, which make record profits year after year, are going to be able to continue taxing their clients.

It is important to point out that it is not very ethical of the banks to make a profit on the backs of consumers just because consumers are unable to do online banking. That is a very worthwhile debate that we must support here. It is not right that the NDP is the only party in the House of Commons to say that we need a government that sets out clear rules and boundaries for banks.

They can make a profit but they cannot have a profit margin of 700% or 800% as they do now. This is where it would be good for the government to tell the banks that they are also not allowed to charge pay-to-pay fees.

[English]

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest as the hon. member pretended to stand up for the middle class. However, let us take a look at NDP policy. It would raise taxes by billions of dollars, as is stated in its 2011 election platform. Every single time we have cut taxes over the last four years that the member has been in the House, she has voted against that.

Adjournment Proceedings

In the Canadian middle class, a typical family of four is now better off, to the tune of \$3,400 more in their pockets every single year, than they were prior to the Conservative government being in power. That is because of the tax changes we have implemented.

I will quote Hillary Clinton, from down south. She had this to say:

Canadian middle class incomes are now higher than in the United States. They are working fewer hours for more pay, enjoying a stronger safety net, living longer on average, and facing less income inequality.

As we have taken the measures that have got us to that point, the member opposite has voted against them every time.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:59 p.m.)

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